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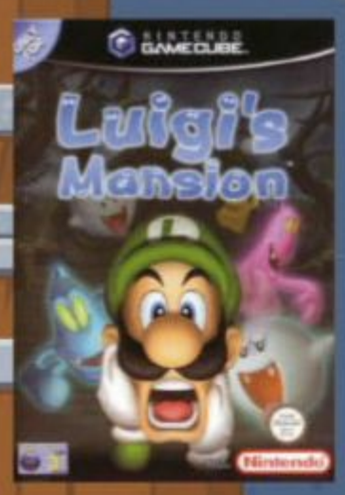

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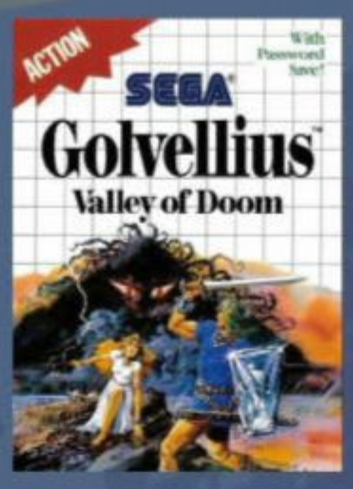

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THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE KONAMI GAME?

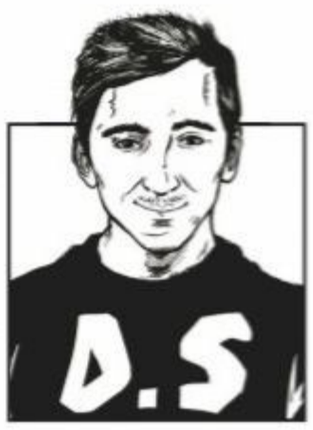
DARRAN JONES

Super Castlevania IV, and not just because it has one of the greatest game soundtracks of all time.

Expertise:
Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful girls and an award-winning magazine

Currently playing:
Haunting Ground

Favourite game of all time:
Strider



DREW SLEEP

Metal Gear Solid 3, its blend of stealth, survival and action is still as exciting today as it was in 2004.

Expertise:
Grooves and/or wars

Currently playing:
Monster Hunter World

Favourite game of all time:
Final Fantasy VIII

NICK THORPE

I've loved *Jubeat* ever since the first time I saw it on test, about a decade ago. Whenever I visit an arcade that has it, you can be sure that I'll play a credit or two.

Expertise:
Owning five Master Systems (I sold two)

Currently playing:
Team Sonic Racing

Favourite game of all time:
Sonic The Hedgehog

WOZ BROWN

I first experienced the joy of four-player co-op via *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles,* courtesy of an Easter funfair. Needless to say, I pumped the majority of my pocket money into it.

Expertise:
Running away in *GoldenEye*

Currently playing:
Mario Kart 8

Favourite game of all time:
The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time

GRAEME MASON

Gradius or rather *Nemesis* here in the UK. The 10p coins I lost thanks to that bad boy…

Expertise:
Adjusting the tape azimuth with a screwdriver

Currently playing:
Halo 3

Favourite game of all time:
Resident Evil 2

PAUL ROSE

Lethal Enforcers on the SNES and *Mega Drive*. It came with a gun – a blue gun for boys, and you could get a pink one for girls!

Expertise:
Winging it

Currently playing:
Shakedown Hawaii

Favourite game of all time:
Half-Life 2

PAUL DRURY

Pooyan, Amidar, Gyruss... Konami made so many great arcade games in the early Eighties, but I'll go for the unadulterated blasting of *Juno First.*

Expertise:
LaserDisc errors

Currently playing:
Days Gone

Favourite game of all time:
Sheep in Space

RORY MILNE

It has to be *Yie Ar Kung-Fu*. It's just so slick, the controls are uber-responsive, and beating its tougher opponents is immensely satisfying.

Expertise:
The game that I'm writing about at the time of writing

Currently playing:
Morpheus

Favourite game of all time:
Tempest

LOADING...

What does Konami mean to you? To me it means two wavy ribbons parallel to each other, one orange and one red, set against a stark white background. Whenever I saw that logo appear on my TV screen it was as much a seal of quality to me as the Nintendo and Sega badges were. I knew that the game that came after that logo was going to be of a high quality and I was rarely, if ever, disappointed.

I'm sure, though, that the word Konami means a completely different thing to every reader that picks up this magazine, and that's largely because Konami has had so much success in the videogame industry over the past four decades; not bad for a company that started off as a repairer and renter of jukebox equipment. *Castlevania*, *Metal Gear*, *Gradius, Contra*, *Pro Evolution Soccer*, *Silent Hill*, Konami has birthed them all and many more besides.

So because Konami means so many different things to so many different gamers we decided to create the ultimate Konami issue in celebration of its 50th anniversary. From stickers full of classic sprites to a 32-page booklet of essential Konami games, issue 195 has something for everyone.

Enjoy the magazine!

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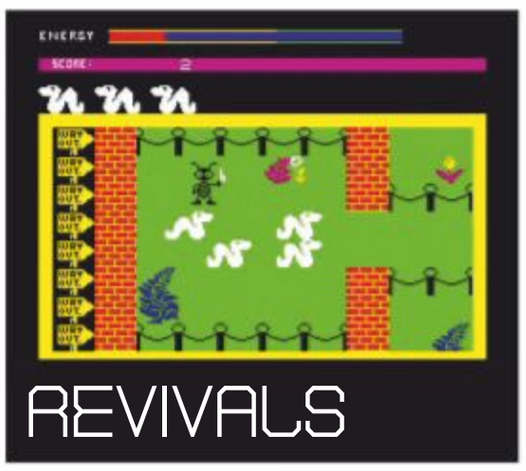

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Don't forget to follow us online for all your latest retro updates

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The Rise Of Amiga Power

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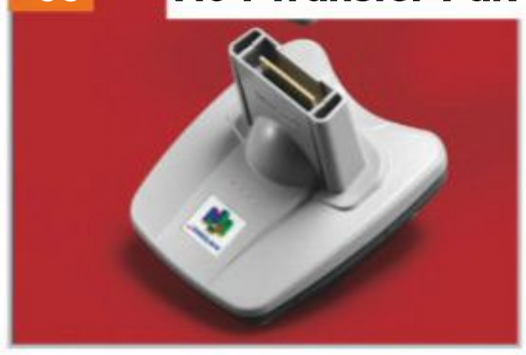

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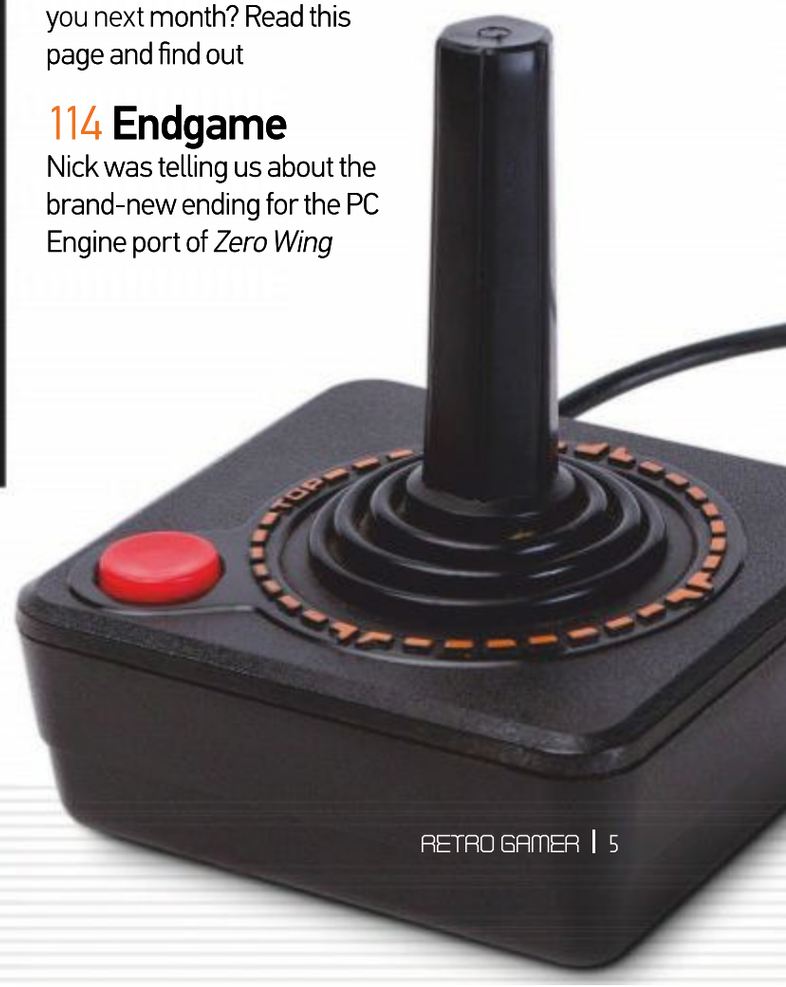

THE WORM TURNS

Earthworm Jim is moving to a surprising new home

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Our resident time traveller breaks down the E3 coverage of July 2002

Tommy Tallarico, who is known for his work as a videogame composer, recently sent the gaming world into a spin when he revealed that a brand-new *Earthworm Jim* game was being made for the upcoming Intellivision Amico console – another project which Tommy is the driving force behind. Additionally, he revealed that virtually all the members of the original *Earthworm Jim* team, which should include Dave Perry, Nick Bruty, Mike Dietz and Doug TenNapel, are also helping out. We spoke to Tommy to find out more.

Why has it taken so long to reassemble the old team, and what is it like to be back working together?

We have tried to do something similar in the past, but there were always a few people who either weren't available or there were rights issues with the licence. We didn't want to do it unless we could get everyone on board. But we now understand why it took so long, because the way we are creating this new game could have *only* be done on the Intellivision Amico.

Being CEO of the company, I know that probably sounds like a self-promoting statement, but it's true! We always talked about doing something completely different from a gameplay perspective, and the fact that every person in the room has their own screen and the system is focused around 'friends and family in a room together' makes what we want to do possible. We never just wanted to do another side-scrolling platform game 25 years later. We did the game like that back then because all we had was a controller with a d-pad and three or four buttons. The new Intellivision controller gives us the flexibility to do humour in a unique way that has never been done before. I can't wait for people to see all of the unique things we're doing.

Having the entire team back together is amazing. Even though it was 24 years since we were all in a room together you would have never known. We're all exactly the same and it's as if we just jumped ahead 24 years in a time machine. All of the magic, respect, creativity and friendship is still 100 per cent there.

Are there any key members who won't be returning?

One of our programmers, Andy Aster passed away 15 years ago of cancer. He was the only main team member who wasn't there for our reunion.

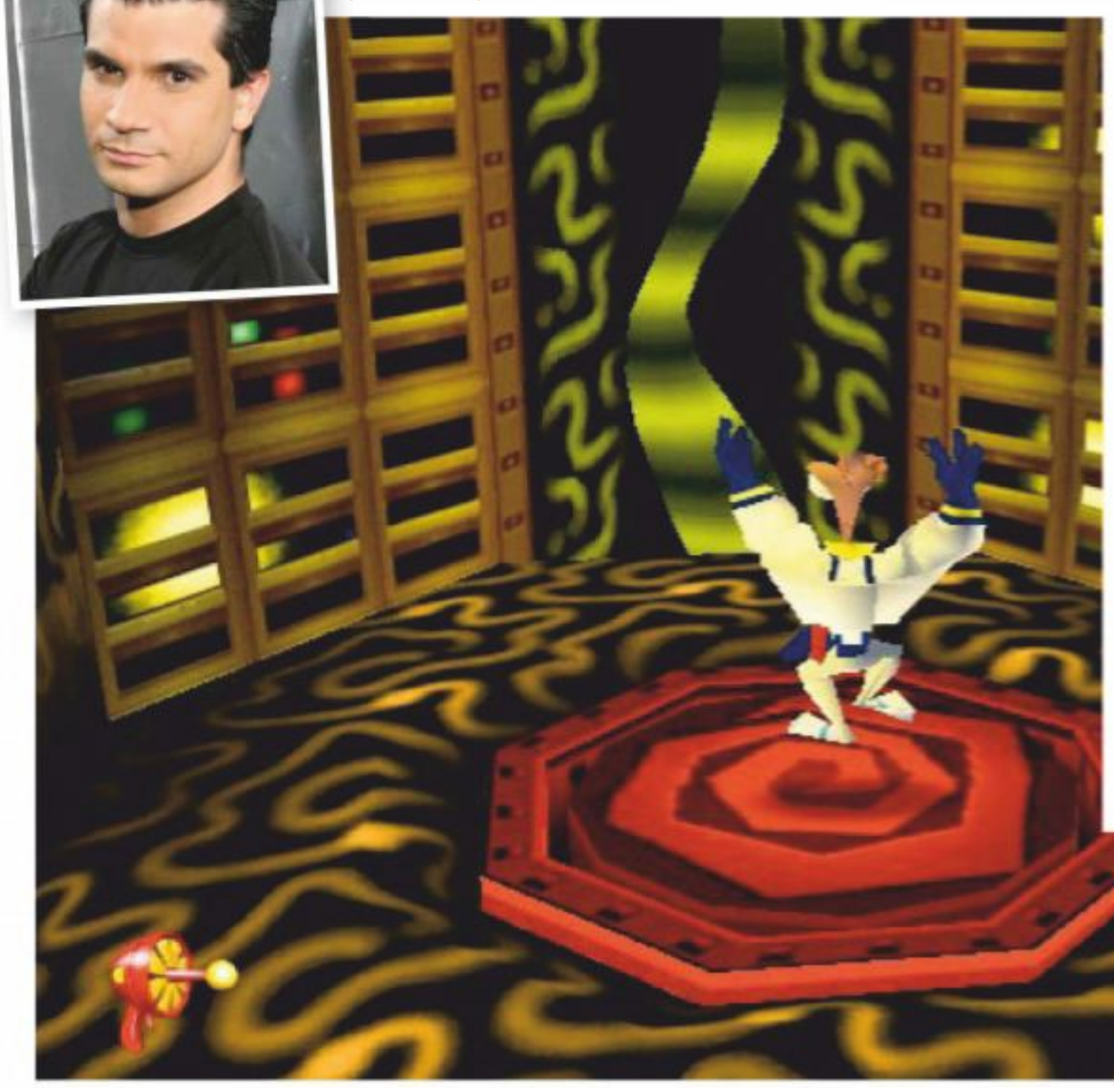
Are you setting up a studio, or will people be working remotely?

Mostly remote, but some team members are in the same offices, such as me and Mike Dietz (animation director and now art director of Intellivision). The teams are mostly in Orange County, CA (where we originally made the game) and a few in San Francisco.

How will you recapture the original team spirit if you're working from different locations?

We have an online area where we cultivate ideas. When the time comes we could all get together again or do video conferencing if possible.

» Tommy Tallarico has big plans for his new Intellivision system, and they now include *Earthworm Jim*.



» [N64] Tommy has told us that Jim's Amico adventure won't be in 3D like the N64 game… ouch, our Woah Nellies! [Sorry ,Tommy, we won't mention it again - Ed].

How come you haven't gone down the crowdfunding route?
We've talked about it – not because we need the money, but because it would be a very fun way to involve the fans into the process. We may still do it, but it would also be challenging to do a crowdfunding campaign for a system that isn't out on the market yet. It's still up in the air, though, but unlikely.

Will it be a platformer again?
It may have some small elements or sections of platforming, but as a whole, no! It won't be a platformer. Too easy. We've always wanted to do something that pushes ideas and to do things no one has ever done before. That's what gets us excited and that is what the Intellivision Amico provides.

Why is it releasing exclusively on the Amico?
Because it's the only system capable of achieving our goals. Not because of the 'power' (it's not nearly as powerful as all the other current systems) but because of the idea of multiple people in a room together all having screens and certain controls. We're doing things on the Intellivision that can't be done anywhere else.

Will it be a 2D game or a 3D offering like the N64 game?
If you ever mention the N64 3D game ever again I'm going to kick you in your 'Woah Nellies'! [Laughs]. It will be 2D for sure! Actually... more like 2.5D meaning we may use certain 3D elements, but the characters will still be on a 2D plane.

"We're all exactly the same and it's as if we just jumped ahead 24 years in a time machine"
Tommy Tallerico

***Earthworm Jim* is known for its clever humour and level design. Are you pushing the envelope further this time?**
Absolutely, 100 per cent! That is the lifeblood of an *Earthworm Jim* game. (Except for that 3D one that none of us had anything to do with!) The great thing about *Earthworm Jim* is that you never know what the heck was coming next. It's that somewhat mysterious surprise element that we thrive on.

Our best ideas and funniest moments come from creating the gameplay *around* something funny we want to do! This is the exact opposite of how most people would design humour in a game. For us, jokes are never 'written', we all might think of a really funny 'moment' and that funny moment will spark an idea for a gameplay mechanic. It's never the other way around. I know it may sound odd, but for us, it works.

» Tommy (third from left) and the rest of the team at their recent Earthworm Jim reunion.

Have you been pleased with the reception of the new game's announcement so far?
It's been unbelievable! The announcement received over 526 million impressions! That's pretty GROOOOOOOVY!

READERS REACT

What do you want from a new Earthworm Jim game?

Didn't know it was happening. But keep the fully automatic pistol, fun platforming and overall weirdness and I am on board.
@_LastLegend

I want the same great animation and improved visuals to make it easier to tell what is and what isn't a platform.
@videogamenewsr2

Mixed feelings, really. The original was neat at the time, and is very much 'of its time' for better or worse. I always preferred the animated series, to be honest.
@Stressed Local

I am. But I ain't buying the new system it's exclusively on.
@RonaldSDean

I am really excited for Jim's return. Basically the same game, but with save states of some sort. Maybe a little more frantic gameplay?
@sidcrazysteve

I'm super stoked for as new *Earthworm Jim* game, just bummed out I most likely won't play it since it's gonna be stranded on a console I don't think I will get. I would love to see some of that *Earthworm Jim* humour set around a little more serious story.
@CalebMickel

JOIN THE CLUB

ANDY PALMER ON OPENING UP A BRAND-NEW ARCADE CLUB IN LEEDS

Andy Palmer is a very patient man. The owner of Bury's Arcade Club has just opened a brand-new venue in Leeds and has been constantly shuttling between the two locations in order to ensure that everything is perfect for this month's launch. "I have actually been planning to open multiple venues for years," he candidly tells us,"but first I needed to see if my business model worked before we committed to more venues."

Andy has been putting lots of thought into his new location and he's aware of just how important each decision he makes is as well as the risks he has to take. "Location is always the main factor as well as population demographics," he continues. "Also, the initial investment in a new venue is huge! (Whatever number you're thinking of, double it)," he says with a chuckle. "There is also a duty to the people who want to join you – it has to be right, some people have given up 20-year careers! Which is both flattering and scary at the same time. I 'think' I've got it right, but time will tell."

Any great arcade needs a good variety of games, and by the sounds of it Andy is not messing around when it comes to spectacle for Arcade Club Leeds. "We have pretty much everything from *Pong* to some of the latest games that are still a pound a go in your local bowling alley," he proudly tells us. "Leeds has a ground floor, which means we have installed some of the larger machines we have such as deluxe versions of Sega classics like *OutRun*, *Space Harrier*, *Power Drift* and *Super Hang On*, as well as Japanese imported games such as exclusive rhythm games and bullet hell shooters. The venue opened with around 250 original arcade games, in my opinion probably the strongest opening of any arcade in the world, add to that all the consoles, PCs, VR and classic computers and you have a truly world class venue – right here in the UK."

> **"The initial investment in a new venue is huge"**
> Andy Palmer

» Andy Palmer (right, pictured with Jason Bradbury from *The Gadget Show*) has done a fantastic job bringing classic arcade games to the masses.

» Where else but Arcade Club can you find a *Daytona* cab next to a *Point Blank* machine?

Of course, having an exceptional selection of classic games means nothing to the average consumer if the price of entry is too high, but Andy is confident that the same pricing structure that worked in Bury will prove just as popular in Leeds. "I feel it's important to have the same pricing structure across venues," he explains. "Food and drink will be available (as it is in Bury) but we are going to provide a building (next door) where we will extend the menu and drink offerings. More on that in the near future."

While Andy is confident of Arcade Club Leeds, he's aware that spreading valuable resources across multiple venues could make fixing machines difficult. "That's one of my biggest concerns," he admits, "but we have a great team of professionals who are dedicated to keeping these games going for many years to come – luckily I have been amassing spares and equipment for many years and we have spare monitors, game boards and even cabs for most of the games we have."

So with a second venue now open and rumours of a third on the way we were keen to know what makes Arcade Club such a success. "It's simple," Andy concludes. "Everything is priced fairly, whatever your situation/income you can always pop down to AC and have a great time for what is very little money in today's world." It's certainly hard to argue with that logic.

» Older games are harder to look after, but Andy is confident in his team's ability to keep them running.

» Arcade Club Leeds features vintage cabinets of all shapes and sizes. Here's Atari classic, *Pong*.

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» [Mega Drive] You're certainly saving a lot of money if you pick up a Mega Drive Mini.

MORE MINI NEWS

Sega has announced ten more games for its plug-and-play console, meaning there are ten more left to come. In addition to the usual suspects, including *Golden Axe*, *Sonic Spinball*, *Vectorman* and *The Story Of Thor*, there are three bangers from Capcom: *Ghouls 'N Ghosts*, *Street Fighter II: Special Champion Edition* and *Mega Man: The Wily Wars*. The *Street Fighter* inclusion has drawn a little controversy as no six-button pads comes with the machine, meaning you'll have to spend additional cash if you want the full experience. The addition of *Mega Man* is great news as it usually sells for over £200. No doubt we'll know the final ten titles in time for the next issue.

ABE HAS GOT SOUL

It's been a long time since its announcement in 2016, but Oddworld Inhabitants and Fat Kraken Games have revealed new details about their sequel to *Oddworld: New 'N' Tasty*. Like *New 'N' Tasty*, *Soulstorm* is a remake (of *Abe's Exodus* this time around), and will include new story elements and expanded locations. While you'll still be guiding Mudokons to safety, new mechanics include looting and crafting, meaning even fans of the original will have their hands full solving Abe's new adventure. The second part of Oddworld's planned quintet, *Oddworld: Soulstorm* will be out in 2020.

Day of Play

Our thoughts about this year's Play Expo Manchester show

Manchester's annual Play Expo event has become one of the highlights for any retro gaming fan and this year's was no different. Actually, it was a little different, because it was housed at the Manchester Central Exhibition Complex instead of its usual home at Event City.

Easily accessible and with plenty of space in the main hall, the new location seemed to easily handle the large crowds that turned up to marvel at all the excellent games that were on offer. As always, the many pinball tables and arcade machines were constantly in use, and there was a great variety of games on offer catering to all tastes. *Space Invaders* Part II, *Marble Madness* and *Power Drift* were just a few of the classics on offer and there were rarely long waits to play any of them.

Plenty of old computers and consoles were on proud display for anyone to try, as well as modern systems such as the PS4 and Xbox One. There were also kiosks showing off excellent new games like *Pacer*, a *WipEout* clone with art by The Designers Republic, while the virtual reality units were pulling in big crowds eager to see the next frontier in gaming. While there weren't as many retro speakers as we would have liked, the big star of the day was easily Matthew Smith, who gave an honest and open talk hosted by our own Paul Drury. He also revealed that he would be teaming up with Antstream and that his games would be heading to the online service.

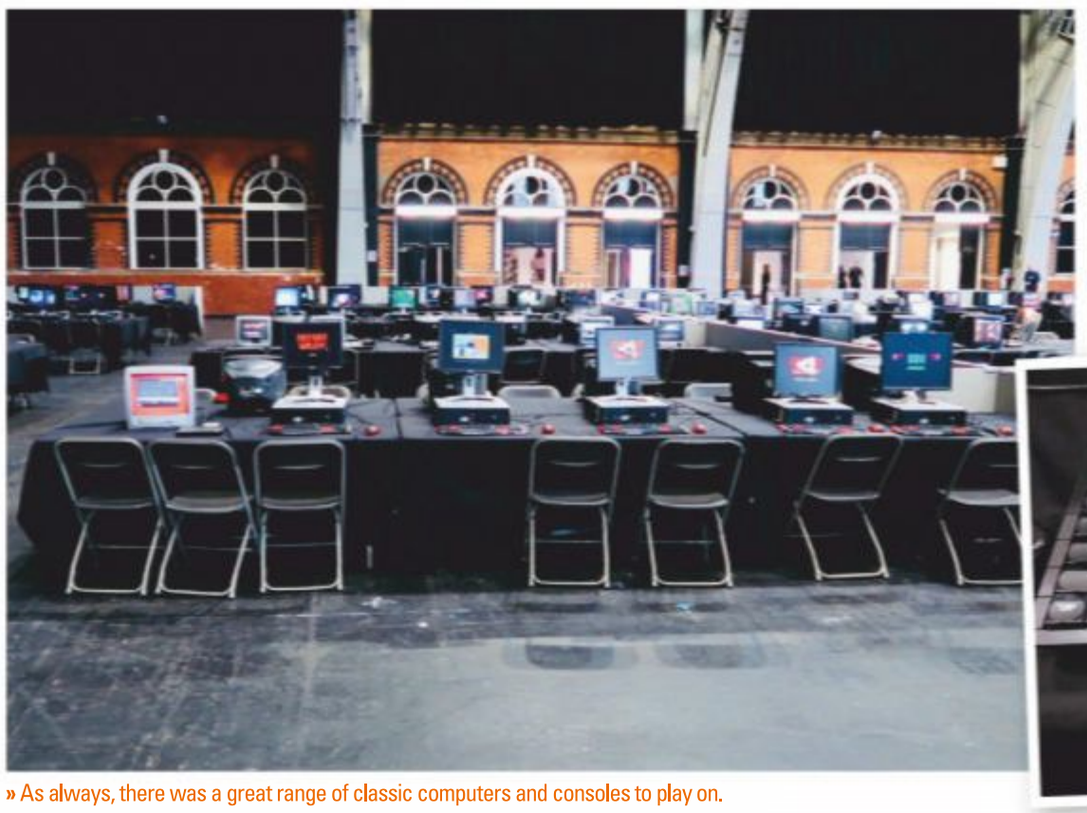
» There were plenty of great arcade machines on display, including classics like *Space Invaders Part II*.

Speaking of Antstream, we were able to have a go on the upcoming streaming service and while there's no denying it's a great concept (we particularly enjoyed the many different challenges that were available) it does feel like it's marketed towards casual players, rather than retro enthusiasts. It's still a while away from launch, though, so hopefully the lag and artefacting issues we experienced on the unit we played on will be ironed out.

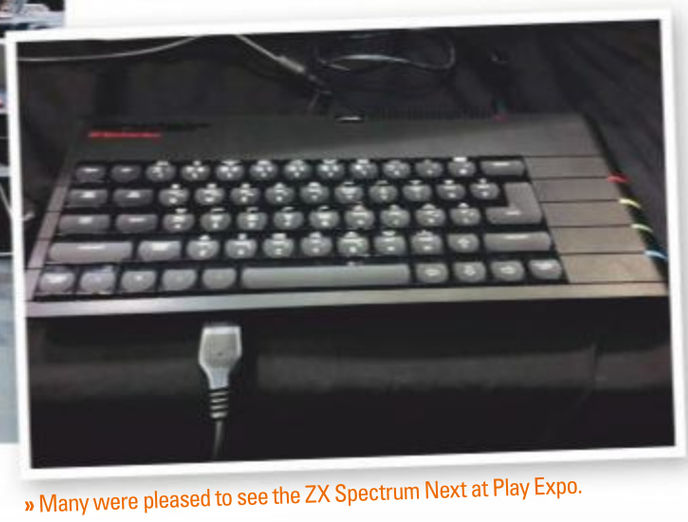
There were plenty of sellers at the event, and while some of the prices on display were verging on the eBay sides of things of ridiculous, it was still possible to pick up some decent bargains, particularly from the Japanese sellers. As always, the secret at events like this is to haggle and haggle well. The range of items available to buy was great too, with all sorts of cool gaming merchandise being made from beads, papers and other materials.

» Playing all the pinball tables left Darran itching to buy one for his gaming shed.

Overall, Play Expo was a great day out and it was fantastic to be able to meet numerous developers and readers and enjoy one of the UK's biggest gaming shows. We'll see you all there again next year.



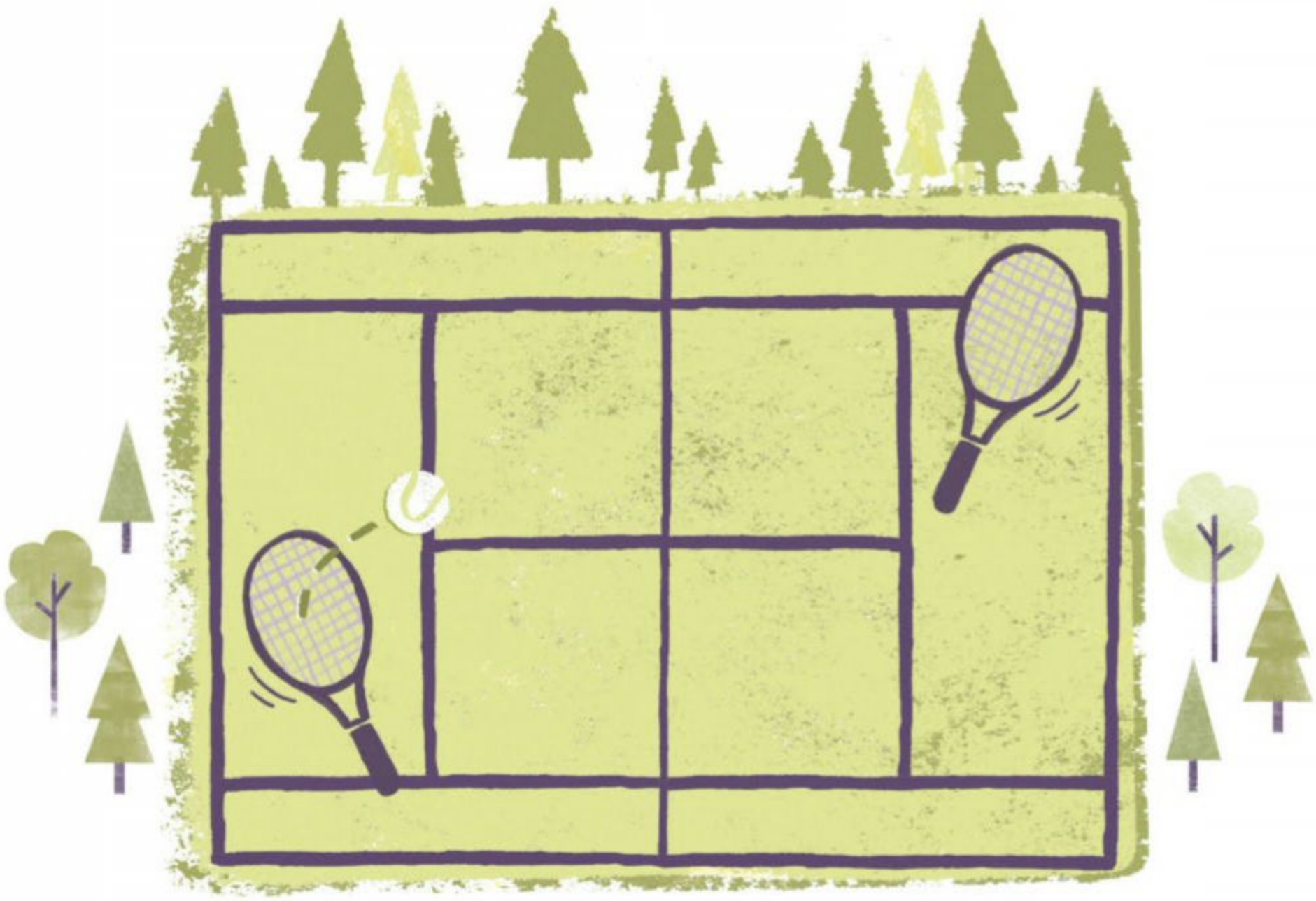
» As always, there was a great range of classic computers and consoles to play on.



» Many were pleased to see the ZX Spectrum Next at Play Expo.

45 THOUSAND

TENNIS COURTS EVERY DAY!



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TWO SIDES

Who is Paul Rose?
Paul is probably better known as Mr Biffo – the creator of legendary teletext games magazine Digitiser. These days, he mostly writes his videogame ramblings over at Digitiser2000.com. If you want more Biffo in your eyes, you can catch him as the host of Digitizer The Show at www.bit.ly/biffo2000.

Cheap thrills

Summer is about to claw its way from the chrysalis of Spring, bringing with it hayfever, barbecues and trips to the coast. For me, summer is entwined with arcades. Growing up, it was rare that I ever set foot in an arcade outside of seaside summer holidays. On holiday with my parents and grandparents, my pocket money would be spent on two things: fossils (don't ask) and the arcades.

When I go to the seaside these days, I make a point of visiting the arcades, in the hope of getting a fix of nostalgia. Unfortunately, I despair somewhat when I go into an arcade these days. Gone are the games which exist to be played, replaced now by machines which dispense hundreds of tickets that can be redeemed for tat. Most of these machines, I weep to acknowledge, are published by Sega.

Even the machines which appear to be games – huge, flashy, reinterpretations of *Space Invaders* or *Pac-Man*, or scaled-up recreations of smartphone games – are disguised ticket-spewers. There's something ugly about it, something horribly materialistic – not to mention that they're essentially a form of gambling, albeit one aimed at kids. It feels like the legends of our youth are now being pimped out, forced to dance in tacky, skimpy, costumes, begging for tips.

Sure, there are still the old classics – the penny falls, the claw machines, which have always been there. Plus, most arcades usually have one or two large-scale lightgun or driving game setups, but arcades are no longer a place you go to escape, to be dazzled by the other worlds they offered. They're places where greed is encouraged.

I'm not naive, even as a kid I knew that arcade games were always there to encourage you to keep pumping money into them. I spent a small fortune on *Dragon's Lair* to see another 30 seconds of animation (which I could've got for free at home by watching kids' TV). Now, more than ever, though, it feels as if arcades are exploiting our fundamental weaknesses.

I get that arcades are in competition with consoles, but there was a time – about 15 years or so ago – when it appeared that what arcades could offer were games on a grander scale than we could get on our home machines. Remember the huge *Galaxian 3* arcade theatre? It bridged a gap between videogames and theme parks, but those days appear to be gone.

At some point, somebody realised that ticket-dispensing machines were like crack cocaine to a ten year-old – offering a chance to hold in their hands a physical demonstration of their skill, and then redeeming it for a malformed rubber Batman.

Yet, if we didn't have the arcades of old we'd never have had videogames. Arcade games once attracted players through their graphics and their gameplay. Without them we'd never have had *Asteroids*, *Space Harrier* or *Street Fighter II*. Arcades are the bedrock of the games industry, and it feels like that bedrock has been eroded by greed. ✱

Do you agree with Paul's thoughts? Contact us at:

RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag darran.jones@futurenet.com

KillPixel

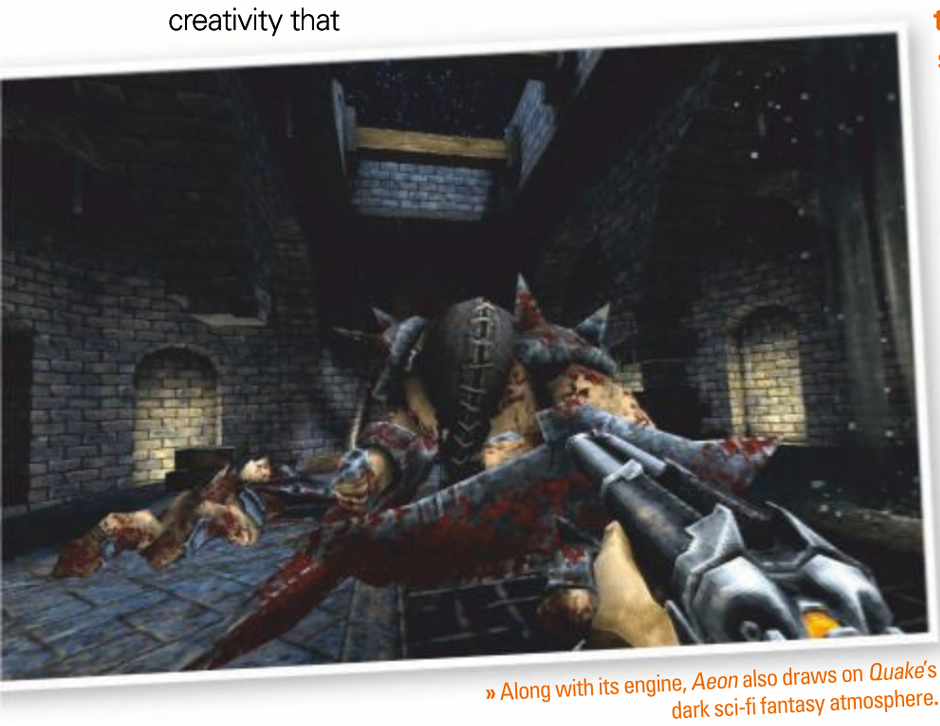
Studio head Jeremiah Fox talks us through his retro-style FPS, Wrath: Aeon Of Ruin

Fans of old-school first-person shooters would've rocket-jumped in delight upon the announcement of *Wrath: Aeon Of Ruin* earlier this year. Built on a modified *Quake* engine, it harks back to that era of shooters, complete with gib-packed action and explosive weaponry. It started off as a passion project for indie developer KillPixel, however 3D Realms liked what it saw of a prototype and has offered to help with its development. We caught up with KillPixel's studio head Jeremiah Fox to learn more.

» The team is making *Wrath: Aeon Of Ruin* using a modified version of the original *Quake* engine, so it should look and feel familiar to fans of gibbing.

Can you tell us a bit about the world of *Wrath: Aeon Of Ruin*?
Well, the main goal, being that *Wrath* is a classically styled first-person shooter, is to dominate the enemy and survive while doing so. The story and game world, known as the 'Old World', has plenty to offer. It really is a sprawling and mysterious place. As the player explores they'll be able to stitch together pieces of the past, glimpse the majesty it once was, and discover their reason for being there. The player does this naturally without being spoon-fed an explicit narrative. There is a story, but it's deftly told so as not to burden the player with long-winded exposition.

Why use the original *Quake* engine to make *Wrath*? What benefits does it have?
There are a few reasons we chose this tech, the primary one being is that it imbues the game with a certain 'feel'. The tech is, of course, quite limited, but we think these limits spark a certain creativity that makes the game more interesting in subtle ways. This is a major factor in the overall vibe of Nineties FPS games, and rather than attempting to emulate this in a modern engine, it made more sense to be authentic from the very foundation and allow these nuances to occur organically. Working with the *Quake* engine is rewarding, though it's certainly a labour of love.



» Along with its engine, *Aeon* also draws on *Quake*'s dark sci-fi fantasy atmosphere.

Updating and developing in such an old game engine must have its drawbacks, what modern design elements have you incorporated to make *Wrath* look so good?
Much of the legwork has already been done engine-side. We're using DarkPlaces, a *Quake* source port, as a base and just making tweaks and changes to it as we go. Like *Quake*, *Hexen II* and others, *Wrath: Aeon Of Ruin* is written with QuakeC, a C-like language exclusive to the *Quake* engine. We're pretty much pushing it to the limits. Regarding the visuals, we're just leveraging the engine's increased limits while still remaining faithful to the spirit of this sort of aesthetic. For example, we have more frames of animation, a few more polygons, a few more colours, and larger and more detailed spaces. This area is where discipline and self-imposed limits come in. We could use way more polygons, colours, etc if we wanted to, but that wouldn't be faithful to this type of game.

» Some of the weapons will feel familiar, like a shotgun, but you'll also wield strange biomechanical firearms.

Can you give us a little taste of what we could expect from *Wrath*'s gameplay?
In addition to fast-paced, interesting combat, the world itself is vast and brimming with areas to explore, all filled with various rewards. There's ammo, armour, health, weapons, secrets and everything else one would expect, but there are also Artifacts: a collectable and consumable item the player can use at any time. Things like the Life Siphon which gives the player health for each enemy they slay. On the other side we have the usual multiplayer modes and are exploring other more interesting modes. Something like a melee-only knife-fight. Co-op could also be really cool, if done correctly. I think having a co-op-specific campaign would be far more interesting than just allowing multiple players in the base game simultaneously. We shall see!

***Wrath: Aeon Of Ruin* is due for release in 2020.**

» While the gunplay will be fast and frantic, Jeremiah tells us you will get chances to explore your surroundings.

BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES

JULY 2002 – The time for promises is over – the consoles are out and showing their power. Now it's all about games, and E3 is where you'll find them. Nick Thorpe is your guide to the most exciting gaming event of 2002

[PC] After years of *Quake*, *Doom*, the big daddy of first-person shooters, was set to return – but would the new horror focus pay off?

NEWS JULY 2002

On 3 July, Paul Kelleher was arrested after decapitating a statue of Margaret Thatcher. The theatre producer was charged with criminal damage and never denied his actions, claiming that his attack on the marble statue was an act of artistic expression. An initial trial in December 2002 failed to determine if he had broken the law, but he was convicted at retrial in January 2003.

French president Jacques Chirac was the target of an assassination attempt on 14 July, Bastille Day. Gunman Maxime Brunerie attempted to shoot the politician with a .22 rifle, but fired wide due to his inexperience. He was tried on charges of attempted murder in December 2004, and was sentenced to ten years imprisonment upon conviction.

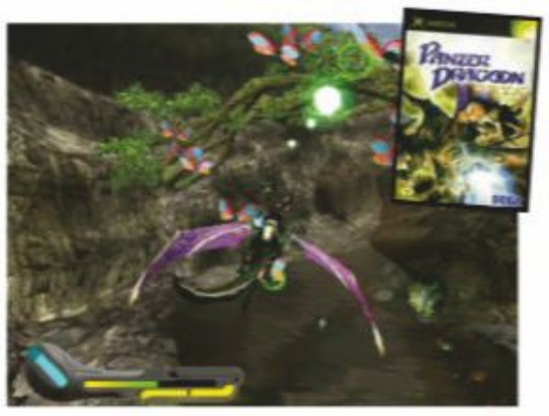
The deadliest air show accident in history took place on July 27 at Sknyliv airfield in Ukraine, during a show to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the country's 14th Air Corps. A Sukhoi Su-27 piloted by Volodymyr Toponar and Yuriy Yegorov lost control, before striking a grounded aircraft and crashing into the crowd. 77 people died, including 28 children, and 100 more were hospitalised. The pilot and copilot received massive fines and prison sentences, despite Toponar's insistence that mechanical failures were to blame.

THE LATEST NEWS FROM JULY 2002

The press had returned from the sun of LA to provide us an update on everything at E3, and there was some interesting news. Microsoft was the first of the major players to show its hand, and it emphasised that it was going to be sticking around for the long term. The company announced that it had budgeted $2 billion over the coming five years for the ongoing development of the Xbox platform ("which sounds suspiciously like Xbox 2", according to *Edge*). Games highlighted during the press conference included the RPG *Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic*, Sega's *Panzer Dragoon Orta*, *Blinx: The Time Sweeper*, *Fable*, *Dead Or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball* and *Ninja Gaiden*. But the big announcement concerned Microsoft's online service – it would be branded Xbox Live, and would launch in the autumn for US customers.

Sony followed, and announced that an astonishing 30 million PS2 consoles had shipped worldwide. If there's a hint of complacency in Kaz Hirai's proclamation that "the console war is over", it's not shown in Sony's business tactics – the company confirmed a US price cut for the PS2, and announced that a deal had been signed to keep *Grand Theft Auto III* exclusive to the PS2 for four years. Games shown off included *Ratchet & Clank*, *The Mark Of Kri* and *The Getaway*, as well as the online prowess of *Final Fantasy XI*. In a huge coup, EA president John Riccitello joined the presentation and announced that Sony's console would be getting the only online-capable version of *Madden NFL 2003*.

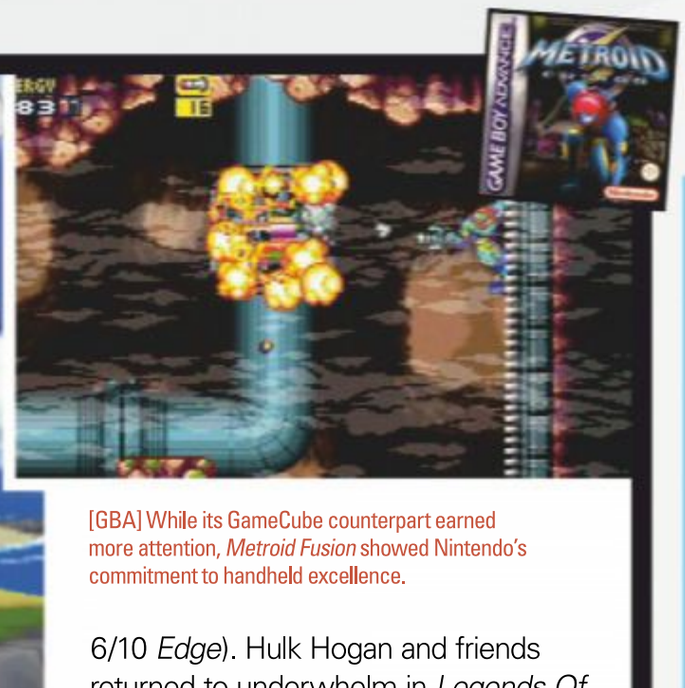
Nintendo promised more GameCube releases over the coming nine months than any previous Nintendo platform had received in such time. What's more, executive vice president Peter MacDougall expressed the sentiment that the line-up was possibly Nintendo's greatest ever, before showing off *Metroid Prime*, *Eternal Darkness*, *Resident Evil Zero* and *Star Fox Adventures*. Other games highlighted included *Mario Party 4*, *1080° White Storm* and *Wario World*. But the big hitters were saved until last, as Shigeru Miyamoto took to the stage to show off *Super Mario Sunshine* and *The Legend Of Zelda: The Wind Waker*. The latter perhaps didn't go down as well as hoped: "this is what the audience had been saving their energy for, but as soon as the cel-shading appears you can almost hear a collective – and



[Xbox] Japanese Xbox games like *Panzer Dragoon Orta* were highlighted in an attempt to woo eastern audiences.

[PS2] Sony's conference showed off solid first-party titles like *Ratchet & Clank*, but largely played it safe.

[GameCube] *The Legend Of Zelda*'s new graphical style for *The Wind Waker* provoked a mixed reaction.



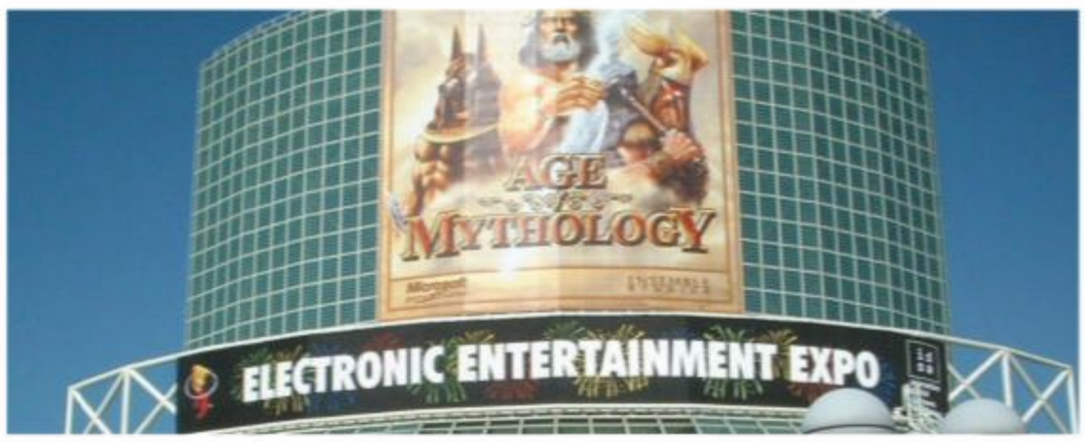
[GBA] While its GameCube counterpart earned more attention, *Metroid Fusion* showed Nintendo's commitment to handheld excellence.

depressing – sigh of disappointment," *Edge* reported. *F-Zero GX* was also shown, albeit in rolling demo form only. Away from the console battle, the Game Boy Advance also received some solid support, with the new titles like *Golden Sun* and *Metroid Fusion* backed up by SNES favourites *Yoshi's Island* and *The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past*. Nintendo was also keen to stress the console's connectivity, showing off GameCube-to-GBA link functionality and the four-player *The Legend Of Zelda: Four Swords*. PC gaming didn't have a dedicated platform for announcements, but those who preferred to play on computers had a headline announcement in the form of *Doom III*. According to *PC Gamer*, the game was moving away from action towards something like "a first-person *Resident Evil* but far, *far* scarier". Other major games on show included *Star Wars: Galaxies*, *Commandos 3*, *Command & Conquer: Generals*, *Far Cry*, *Battlefield 1942* and *Sim City 4*.

With all the games being previewed, it's easy to forget that any games actually came out in July. It was a month for petrolheads, as *Grand Prix 4*'s realism impressed *PC Gamer* enough to earn it a 92% score. *Moto GP* for the Xbox came out at the head of the pack on consoles, earning 8/10 from *XBM* and *Edge*, with the former saying that it "manages to give you full control without making you feel like you're putting in too much effort". Similarly motorised fun could be had in *V-Rally 3* (8/10 *Official PS2 Magazine*, 6/10 *Edge*), and for those who preferred swords and sorcery, *The Elder Scrolls: Morrowind* hit the PC (83% *PC Gamer*, 6/10 *Edge*). Hulk Hogan and friends returned to underwhelm in *Legends Of Wrestling* (47%, *NGC*), while *Official PS2 Magazine* felt that *Army Men RTS* "brings some respectability back to the franchise" and scored it 6/10. *PC Gamer* awarded it 69%.

Finally, at the end of the month the Greek government passed a law banning the playing of any electronic game in a public place, with wording so broad that it effectively criminalised everything from playing arcade games to pulling out your phone for a quick go on *Snake*. This legislation was prompted by the revelation that a member of the ruling PASOK party had been gambling illegally, and was intended to crack down on gambling at internet cafes.

Join us again next time, when the thrills of exciting announcements will have faded away and we'll be left with nothing but a dreary August release schedule to comfort ourselves with.



For the first time in a few years, attendees at the LA Convention Center were focused on games rather than hardware.

CHARTS

JULY 2002

PLAYSTATION 2

1. LMA Manager 2002 (Codemasters)
2. Grand Theft Auto III (Rockstar)
3. Gran Turismo 3: A-Spec (Sony)
4. Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons Of Liberty (Konami)
5. Tekken Tag Tournament (Sony)

XBOX

1. Halo: Combat Evolved (Microsoft)
2. Project Gotham Racing (Microsoft)
3. International Superstar Soccer 2 (Konami)
4. 2002 FIFA World Cup (EA)
5. Max Payne (Rockstar)

PC

1. The Sims: On Holiday (EA)
2. Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast (Activision)
3. Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault (EA)
4. Dungeon Siege (Microsoft)
5. 2002 FIFA World Cup (EA)

MUSIC

1. Anyone Of Us (Stupid Mistake) (Gareth Gates)
2. The Logical Song (Scooter)
3. Shooting Star (Flip & Fill)
4. Your Song (Elton John & Alessandro Safina)
5. Foolish (Ashanti)

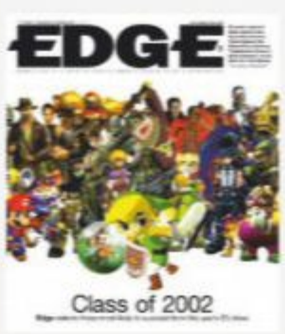
THIS MONTH IN...

PC Gamer

"It has been rumoured for some time now that Interplay were seeking a buyer for their development studio Shiny," notes The Insider. "This month it was confirmed that publishers Infogrames have secured the deal, acquiring Shiny for a whopping $47 million." That comes with the licence for games based on *The Matrix*. Bargain!

Cube

Apparently, the less-than-enthusiastic response to *The Wind Waker* was not universal. "Cel-shaded Link captured everyone's hearts at E3 – many people were heard to say that it reminded them of the SNES version," said *Cube*. Apparently, the style was for the best as it encouraged player imagination.



Edge

"To be honest, I would feel very sad if people thought this was a CG film. I mean we really did a hell of a lot of work on this demo," says Toshihiro Nagoshi of the *F-Zero* demo shown at E3. Compared to the GameCube, he was unimpressed with Xbox. "As a challenger, the console needs more impact."

ENERGY

SCORE: 2

Wriggler

NOT YOUR GARDEN VARIETY RACING GAME

» ZX SPECTRUM » 1985 » ROMANTIC ROBOT

While there are plenty of racing games on the ZX Spectrum, I'd hazard a guess there are none quite like *Wriggler*. Starring a cute quartet of plump maggots, *Wriggler* was one of a handful of games released by Romantic Robot, a company famous for its range of Multiface peripherals. Despite *Wriggler*'s competitive theme, the goal was to simply escape a devilish maze – from the garden and scrublands, to a dangerous underground area and a mansion.

In the tradition of many early 8-bit games, *Wriggler* was devised in a bedroom by two brothers from Cornwall. Going under the pseudonym of Devonshire House, Matthew and Allin Kempthorne drew inspiration from the ancient classic *Snake*, with Matthew challenging his artist brother to animate a cartoon worm on their ZX Spectrum. Soon the pair was devising a game around their new creation, enthused by the brothers' favourite Speccy games. Graphically, it's easy to see how the Ultimate masterpiece *Sabre Wulf* informed the design of *Wriggler*, while the idea of the game's size (a then-massive 256 screens) came from the multiple locations of adventure games such as *The Hobbit*.

Like many ZX Spectrum games, *Wriggler* is a tough one to complete, not least due to its huge labyrinthine maze. And despite a generous allocation of extra lives, enemy insects constantly threaten the lives of your poor maggots. Most of these will sap your energy bar at a steady rate, but there is one particular creature that must be avoided at all costs. With its long spindly legs and skull-like countenance, the spider skulks ominously around the garden and scrubland, with one slight touch killing a careless maggot instantly.

Upon release, *Wriggler* notched a Crash Smash and universally positive reviews, praising its novel theme, colourful graphics and compelling gameplay. But it's that spider, slowly prowling the seemingly-peaceful and bucolic screens that will forever haunt my memory. ✱

50 YEARS OF KONAMI

FROM ARCADE INNOVATION TO MASTERY OF LICENSED GAMES AND HOME CONSOLE EPICS, **KONAMI** HAS CEMENTED AN INDELIBLE LEGACY IN THE GAMING BUSINESS. WE LOOK BACK AT THE COMPANY'S MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Words by Nick Thorpe

Sometimes, a company can mean many different things to different people – and in Konami's case, we'd argue that it's just a sign of success and longevity.

You might know it as a producer of excellent licensed beat-'em-ups, or a leading light in music games. You might have grown up putting coins into *Scramble* and *Frogger*, or the Konami Code into *Gradius* and *Contra*. If asked what the defining Konami series is, you could answer *Castlevania, Metal Gear* or *Pro Evolution Soccer* and back any of those options up with a credible argument.

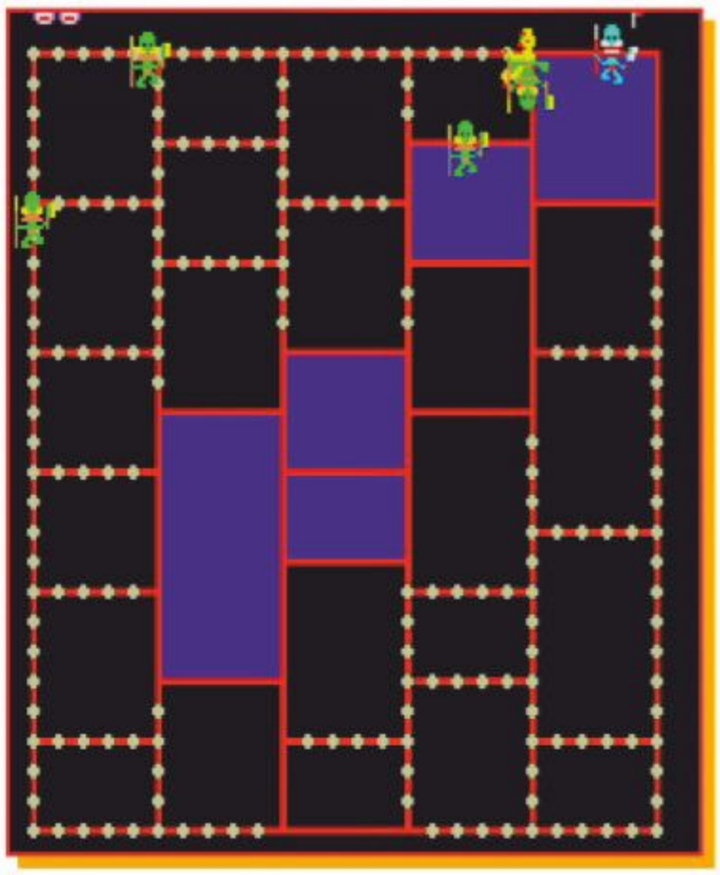
Konami's roots go back to 1969, when it was founded by current Konami chairman Kagemasa Kozuki as a business renting and repairing karaoke machines. The company was fully incorporated as Konami Industry Co, Ltd in 1973, when it shifted its focus to the general manufacture of amusement machines. Many of its earliest videogames were simple shooting and block games, but the company's developers started to implement their own original ideas and broaden the possibilities of gaming. It's arguable that Konami's breakout year was 1981, when it massively increased the number of videogames it released and scored some major arcade hits as a result.

One of the big releases was *Frogger*. "It looked colourful, sounded cheerful, and was popular. However it was proper difficult, and super sneaky," remembers Paul Davies, former editor of *C&VG*. "I remember being hacked off by the sinking turtles and quickly deciding that I wasn't smart enough to endure the challenge. When the crocodiles appeared that was me out. Dastardly." Jaz Rignall, another veteran games writer known for his tenure as the editor of *Mean Machines*, was a fan of the game. "I recall feeling that the frog was really vulnerable because it had no way of protecting itself – it was a game all about avoidance. That made it completely different to pretty much everything else out there at the time." The gameplay wasn't the only thing that made it distinctive, either. "Something else I noticed – and this is anecdotal - but a lot of female gamers in my local arcade really enjoyed playing *Frogger*. Along with *Pac-Man*, *Frogger* seemed to have that quintessential *je ne sais quois* that gave it broad appeal to gamers of all ages and sexes."

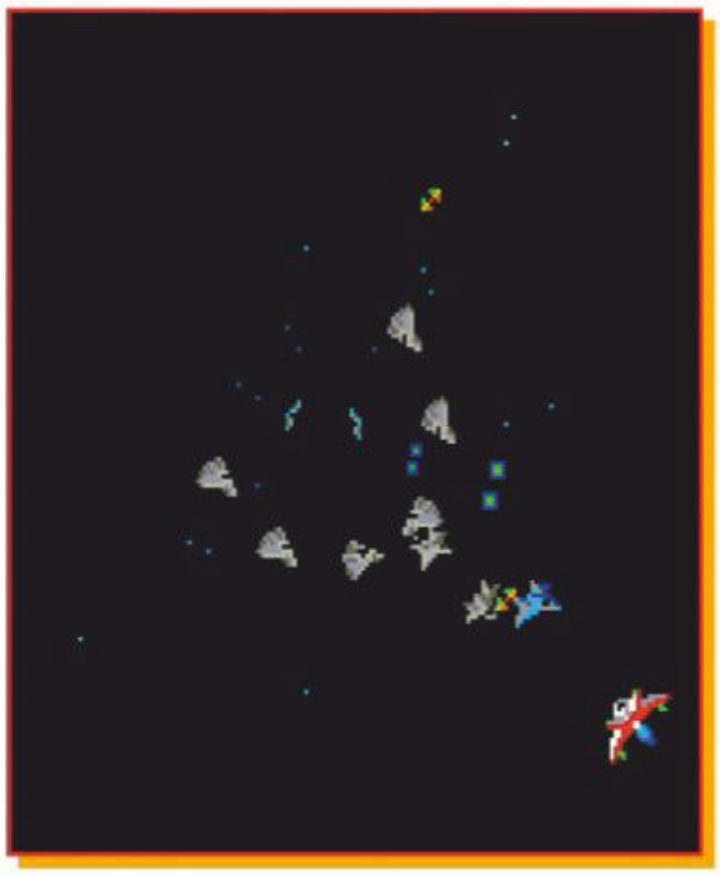
» Konami veteran Nobuya Nakazato is known for his work on the *Contra* series.

Nobuya Nakazato, a veteran of Konami who has worked on games such as *Rocket Knight Adventures*, *Contra: Hard Corps* and *Vandal Hearts*, is less clear on his introduction to the company's work but names two of the company's other big 1981 releases. "I don't have a clear memory, but probably the arcade games *Amidar* or *Scramble*," he explains. "In particular, *Scramble* is the one that established the genre of belt scrolling shooting games and it really amazed me at the time." The game was a big leap forward for shoot-'em-ups thanks to its distinct stages and forced scrolling, which were quickly incorporated into other games in the genre. The company was firmly established in the market and followed up with a string of hits in diverse genres. "Purely based on my personal nostalgia, I think the early to mid-Eighties was a the greatest period for Konami games," says Jaz. "They produced some absolutely amazing coin-ops that featured really interesting and unique gameplay innovations – titles such as *Frogger*, *Pooyan*, *Guttang-Guttong*, *Track & Field*, and *Nemesis* were all highly original and great fun to play."

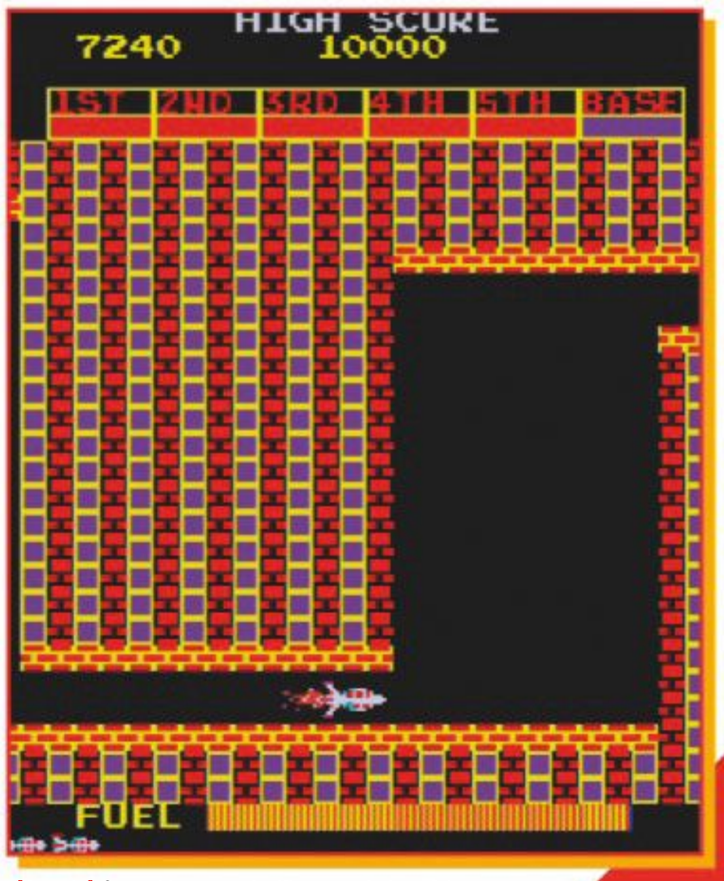
This success allowed Konami to move into the market for home games in 1983, with a number of proven arcade hits converted to the new MSX home computer, as well as the original *Antarctic Adventure* – a game that combined the faux-3D action of racing games with a cute



» [Arcade] *Amidar* was an early hit for Konami, at a time when the maze game genre was booming.



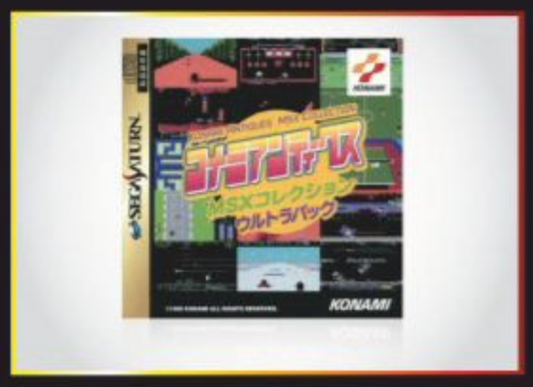
» [Arcade] Many of Konami's early hits including *The End*, *Scramble* and *Gyruss* (pictured here) were shoot-'em-ups.



» [Arcade] *Scramble* was a significant evolution of the genre and was succeeded by Super Cobra.

KONAMI COMPILED

If you're looking to sample Konami's library, try these five compilations



KONAMI ANTIQUES MSX COLLECTION ULTRA PACK

SATURN

■ After three PlayStation compilations of ten games each, lucky Saturn owners got this huge compilation of 30 early Konami games. Many are arcade conversions, but you'll also find MSX originals including *Penguin Adventure* and the first *Parodius*. Sadly, it was a Japanese exclusive.

GRADIUS COLLECTION

PSP

■ This compilation includes *Gradius*, *Gradius II*, *Gradius III* and *Gradius IV*, as well as the excellent PlayStation game *Gradius Gaiden*, which hadn't previously been released outside of Japan. Similar PSP compilations also covered the *Salamander*, *Parodius* and *TwinBee* series, but were only released in Japan.

KONAMI ARCADE CLASSICS

DS

■ This compilation includes 15 of Konami's Eighties arcade hits, such as *Scramble*, *Time Pilot*, *Yie Ar Kung-Fu*, *Green Beret* and *Contra*. As well as the games themselves, you get a good deal of information to provide historical context – not a surprise, as the development was handled by the excellent M2.

METAL GEAR SOLID: THE LEGACY COLLECTION

PS3

■ This compilation covers most of the *Metal Gear* series, including both of the MSX2 games, the first four *MGS* games, *VR Missions* and *Peace Walker*. The games are delivered across two discs, but *Metal Gear Solid* and *VR Missions* are provided as download codes.

"I HAVE THE IMPRESSION THAT KONAMI HAD THE GLOBAL MARKET IN MIND WHEN DEVELOPING MANY OF THEIR GAMES"

Nobuya Nakazato

penguin character. Konami also moved into the burgeoning console market by releasing its first Famicom games in 1985, making it one of the first companies to be granted a publishing licence by Nintendo. The company's choice of target platforms truly maximised its audience, as the MSX became very popular in the Japanese market and Nintendo gained a virtual monopoly on the console market.

By getting into those platforms as they were growing, Konami was able to grow as they did, and combined with its arcade successes, the company was able to expand throughout the early Eighties. The company had begun the decade with ¥40 million in capital, and after a March 1982 investment from Osaka Small and Medium Business Investment & Consultation, that became ¥120 million. Konami opened its American office in November 1982, and by November 1983 the company had ¥300 million in capital. 1984 brought even further growth as Konami opened offices in the UK and Germany, and the company was listed on the Osaka Securities Exchange in October. From there, Konami's growth rate went from rapid to explosive – the company's capital was ¥2.9 billion in October 1984, ¥5.2 million the following November and ¥8.1 billion by November 1986.

Konami began to expand its slate of properties with new titles, many of which would go on to become long-running series. In the arcades, *TwinBee* started a lengthy line of cute-'em-ups and *Mr Goemon* set the stage for the console *Mystical Ninja* series. *Salamander* spun off from *Gradius*, and both made an impact on the NES and other home systems. But the biggest of the lot was *Castlevania*, which introduced us to the Belmont clan of vampire hunters. The initial game was a straightforward horror-themed platformer, but subsequent entries in the series became more elaborate by incorporating alternate routes, character-swapping and eventually large nonlinear maps and RPG elements. Although the series has been dormant for a few years now, it remains beloved by gamers and is a popular Netflix series too. "I still think the series is a very important one for the company," says Jaz. "The series has definitely had its ups and downs over the years – as you'd expect with something like 30 different releases over the past almost three decades – but overall, the *Castlevania* line has delivered some really memorable moments, especially during the 8-bit and 16-bit periods."

Nakazato joined the company during this period of rapid expansion. "I was an artist and I found the graphics quality of Konami games really impressive," he explains when asked why he found Konami to be an attractive employer. "After I joined Konami, I realised they did in-house development of graphic tools (including hardware) implemented with pen tablet input. Considering the standard for graphic production still used a mouse and keyboard, it was very advanced for the time."

» [NES] *Castlevania* quickly became one of Konami's most popular games, as it arrived with most of its key ideas intact.

CASTLEVANIA ANNIVERSARY COLLECTION

VARIOUS

■ This release contains eight games – the first four games in the series for NES and SNES, plus two Game Boy games, the Mega Drive game and the previously Japan-only NES version of *Kid Dracula*. There's plenty of historical material included, too.

» [MSX] Who's that in the crowd? Why, it's Penta! Konami games often reference one another.

Nakazato also felt that the company's advanced tech was matched by its ambitious developments. "I have the impression that Konami had the global market in mind when developing many of their games and gave them a sense of movie-like realism. Also, since the industry was new at that time, the average age of employees was very low and our bosses and department heads were much younger than I am now. In this way, the company had bombastic energy."

Konami definitely had an 'all hands on deck' culture back in the late Eighties. "Nowadays, there are many companies that specialise in debugging games, but at the time no such company existed, we didn't even have a department dedicated to it ourselves," Nakazato explains. "It was normal for the development team to check the game they had worked on themselves. In fact, especially new employees were tasked with checking all the games within their division as part of their training." This meant that in addition to his duties as a graphic artist, Nakazato spent plenty of time as a tester. "I belonged to the development team of *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (NES version), but I helped out with the debugging of many titles such as *Bayou Billy*, *Gradius II* and *Blades Of Steel*. I look back on it as a very valuable experience."

But it was with the emergence of the next generation machines that Konami made another giant leap. Nakazato agrees that the machines of the 16-bit era were important not just for Konami, but gaming as a whole. "I think they played a vital role in ensuring that game consoles, which first started in the 8-bit era, were not forgotten as some passing fad but instead became a more long-lasting form of entertainment." Despite this, Konami wasn't incredibly quick to leap on new technology this time around. In part, that was because it didn't need to – while it had *Gradius III* ready for early adopters of the Super Famicom in 1990, the NES was still the machine with the

PERIPHERAL POWER

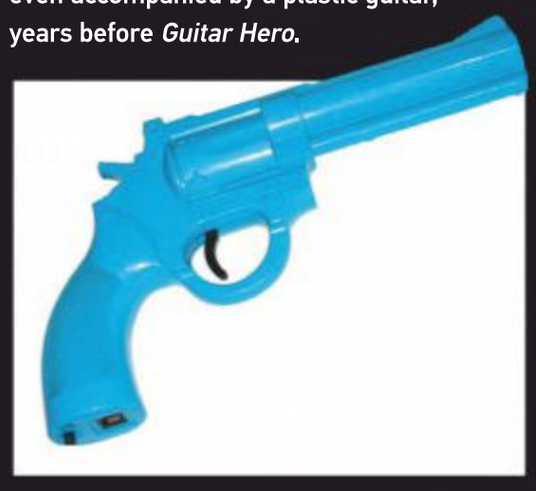
There's more to Konami than games, as its adventures in the peripheral business prove

Konami isn't the first company you'd think of as a hardware manufacturer, but it actually entered the gaming peripheral business back in the Eighties and continued to be involved in it for over two decades. One of the earliest and most surprising was the Game Master, an MSX utility cartridge that essentially functioned as an official cheating device for Konami games. However, most of its controllers were variations on the standard joystick and joypad, such as the HyperBeam wireless SNES controller and the Konami HyperStick for the PlayStation.

Some of the company's offerings have been a little bit more eccentric. The LaserScope, a voice-activated NES lightgun compatible with Zapper games, is notorious amongst fans of oddball gaming items due to its unusual concept. For some reason Game Boy docking stations were tried by more than one manufacturer during the Nineties, and Konami's HyperBoy version offered screen magnification and illumination as well as a joystick. Then there's the HyperShot, a controller with two buttons and nothing else, designed for home conversions of *Track & Field*.

But of course, most of Konami's hardware was manufactured to aid in the home translation of its arcade hits. The Justifier lightgun was created for use with the home conversions of *Lethal Enforcers*, and the Hyper Blaster was the first lightgun to be released for the PlayStation. More recently, many of Konami's special controllers were designed for music games – home conversions of games like *Beatmania* and *DDR* were accompanies by turntable controllers and dance mats. In fact, the home version of *GuitarFreaks* was even accompanied by a plastic guitar, years before *Guitar Hero*.

» The Laser Scope is, let's be honest, a odd creation. Still, how else can you fire weapons with your voice?



» The Justifier lightgun revolver was made specifically for home conversions of *Lethal Enforcers*.

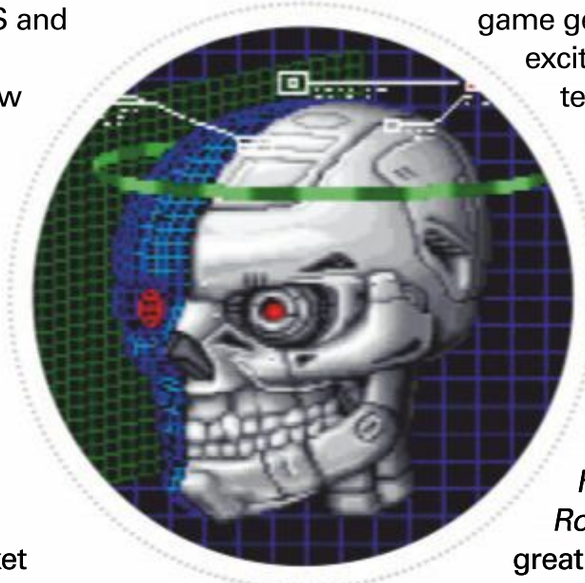
» [Arcade] *Contra* was a popular arcade game, but the series quickly associated primarily with consoles.

» [Arcade] The *Gradius* series became Konami's most popular shooting series.

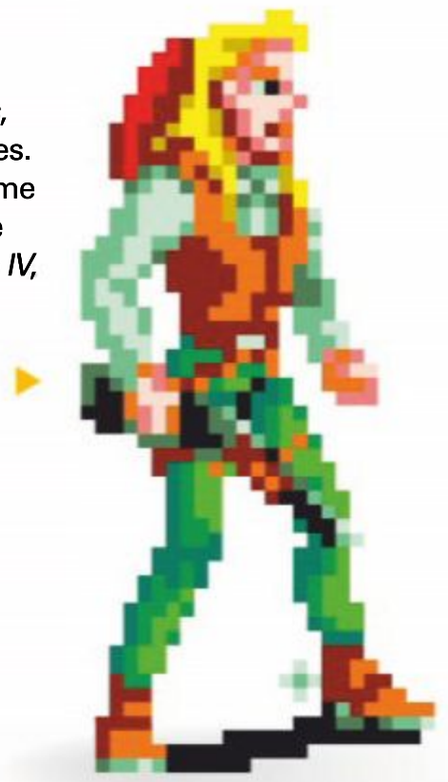
» Jaz Rignall is the former editor of *Mean Machines*.

established audience and international reach. In 1991, Konami released 14 games for Nintendo's 8-bit machine, and just two for the SNES. With its commercially appealing mixture of original properties and popular licensed properties such as *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, *The Simpsons*, *X-Men* and *Tiny Toon Adventures*, Konami could afford to rely on the NES and arcades for a little while.

The other reason for the slow adoption of new console technology was that it didn't have much choice in the matter. Due to Nintendo's restrictive third party licensing contracts, Konami had been forced to wait for the SNES rather than trying out next generation systems earlier. But as legal pressure forced Nintendo to relax its restrictions and the MSX market declined, Konami was able to branch out. In 1991 the company made its debut on the PC Engine, where it delivered outstanding conversions of arcade shoot-'em-ups and *Snatcher*, plus the excellent original *Castlevania: Rondo Of Blood* and the first entry of the popular *Tokimeki Memorial* dating sim series. The company released its first Mega Drive games the next year, and would deliver major arcade ports including *Sunset Riders* and *Lethal Enforcers* as well as exclusive classics like *Rocket Knight Adventures* and *Contra: Hard Corps*. While the company had arrived about four years after each machine's debut, it delivered games that forced players to sit up and pay attention.



During this era, it seemed as though the developer was on a different level to others, which meant that the arrival of a new Konami game generated considerable press excitement. "The *Mean Machines* team had all grown up playing Konami arcade games – the company released a ton of absolute classics throughout the Eighties – so for us, the Konami name was synonymous with the good times we all had playing stuff like *Gyruss*, *Track & Field*, *Hyper Sports*, *Yie Ar Kung-Fu*, *Green Beret*, *Shaolin's Road*, *Nemesis*, and all the other great coin-ops that the company had released during that period," says Jaz. "Even in the Nineties, Konami was still manufacturing excellent coin-ops like *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, *X-Men*, and *The Simpsons*, and that prestige rubbed off on its console games. It helped that most of what they released for home systems was pretty good – I'm thinking titles like *Legend Of The Mystical Ninja*, *Super Castlevania IV*, *Tiny Toon Adventures* and *Parodius*. All were excellent and helped raise anticipation for new Konami games considerably."



"KONAMI'S 16-BIT GAMES FELT LIKE BLOCKBUSTERS; THE HALO OR THE LAST OF US-TYPE EXPERIENCES OF THEIR DAY"

Paul Davies

CHARACTER SELECT

Konami has introduced a number of favourite characters to the gaming world over the years – here are some of the most famous

FROGGER

» **DEBUT:** 1981
» **SERIES:** FROGGER
» **LOVES:** ZEBRA CROSSINGS
» **HATES:** HUNGRY CROCODILES

■ Though most people know him for his arcade hit, Frogger was also an active star in the late Nineties and Noughties.

PENTA

» **DEBUT:** 1983
» **SERIES:** ANTARCTIC ADVENTURE
» **LOVES:** PENKO
» **HATES:** VISITING THE GYM

■ This penguin would do anything for love – he'll cross the Antarctic, find a golden apple or even go on a big diet.

MOAI HEAD

» **DEBUT:** 1985
» **SERIES:** GRADIUS
» **LOVES:** ???
» **HATES:** ???

■ We don't know where it came from. The only thing we can tell is that it seems to want to destroy Vic Viper.

GOEMON

» **DEBUT:** 1986
» **SERIES:** MYSTICAL NINJA
» **LOVES:** A GOOD SCRAP
» **HATES:** WEALTH INEQUALITY

■ Loosely based on a real-life folk hero, the lovable Goemon steals from the rich to give to the poor.

SIMON BELMONT

» **DEBUT:** 1986
» **SERIES:** CASTLEVANIA
» **LOVES:** GARLIC BREAD
» **HATES:** TAKING THE STAIRS

■ If you need a vampire killed, find a member of the talented whip-wielding Belmont family.

SOLID SNAKE

» **DEBUT:** 1987
» **SERIES:** METAL GEAR
» **LOVES:** CARDBOARD BOXES
» **HATES:** ANTI-SMOKING LAWS

■ This sneaky soldier is beloved for his combat and infiltration skills. He's also not the only Snake in the series.

BILL & LANCE

» **DEBUT:** 1987
» **SERIES:** CONTRA
» **LOVES:** MICHAEL BAY FILMS
» **HATES:** BEING SEPARATED

■ Nobody is in command here, there's no 'main guy' – just two impressively muscular soldiers.

SPARKSTER

» **DEBUT:** 1993
» **SERIES:** ROCKET KNIGHT
» **LOVES:** SMOKY BACON
» **HATES:** FUEL COSTS

■ This jet pack-wearing opossum was the star of Konami's contribution to the mascot platformer genre.

SHIORI FUJISAKI

» **DEBUT:** 1994
» **SERIES:** TOKIMEKI MEMORIAL
» **LOVES:** YOU, POTENTIALLY
» **HATES:** BEING IGNORED

■ Shiori is your friend, but she's pretty demanding – if you want to date her you'll need to be great at everything.

POWER PRO-KUN

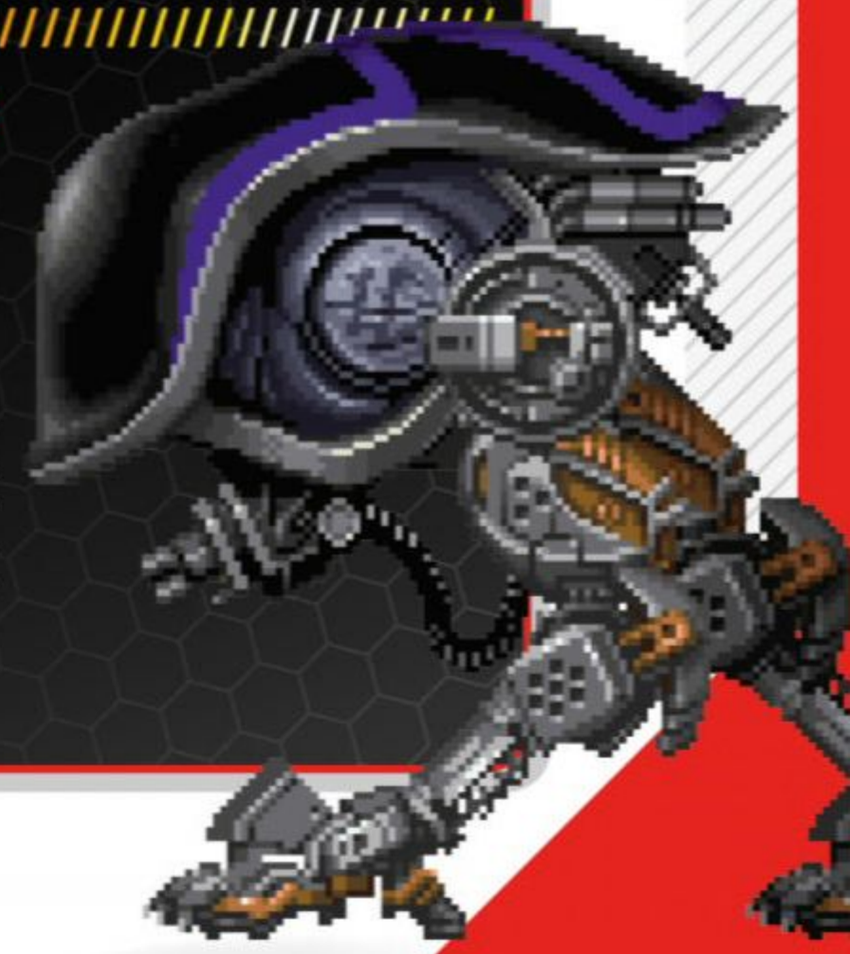
» **DEBUT:** 1994
» **SERIES:** JIKKYOU POWERFUL PRO BASEBALL
» **LOVES:** CYBORG TECHNOLOGY
» **HATES:** CARELESS DRIVERS

■ The aspiring ace of this baseball series isn't one character, but many.

PYRAMID HEAD

» **DEBUT:** 2001
» **SERIES:** SILENT HILL
» **LOVES:** MANNEQUINS
» **HATES:** YOU

■ He's big, he's strong and worst of all, he's almost certainly born from your subconscious thoughts.



» [NES] Blades Of Steel proved Konami could excel in any genre.

CRACKING THE CODE

The most famous cheat code in gaming was born in Konami's titles – but what it actually does changes depending on the game you're playing. Here's a look at some of the things it can do

GRADIUS

NES

■ This was the first game to introduce the code, and using it confers awesome destructive power upon Vic Viper by giving it a full set of power-ups.

CONTRA

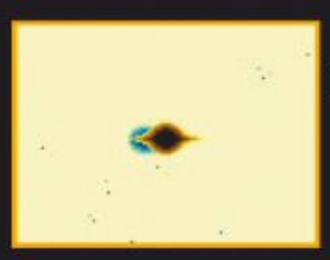
NES

■ This arcade conversion was one of the most famous games to include the code, as it gave the player 30 lives with which to surmount its mighty challenge.

KID DRACULA

NES

■ By this point, Konami was wise to the widespread practice of trying the code to see what happened. So this *Castlevania* spin-off recognises it, but that's all.



GRADIUS III

SNES

■ The code here does the same as in the NES *Gradius*, except that it also kills you instantly. Use the shoulder buttons instead of left and right, and it won't.

CASTLEVANIA: BLOODLINES

MEGA DRIVE

■ The code is normally used to make things easier, but entering it on the title screen of this game unlocks the ability to choose Expert difficulty mode.

» [Arcade] Konami showed it could handle licensed properties well, with classics like *The Simpsons*.

"Konami's 16-bit games felt like blockbusters; the *Halo* or *The Last Of Us*-type experiences of their day. You'd be dusting off the office thesaurus to search for words to describe them, they were so ambitious," says Paul. "*Contra III* and *Super Castlevania IV* especially were epic quests, beautiful to look at, incredible soundtracks, bursting with ideas, perfect in execution. Even brighter titles such as *Tiny Toons*, *Parodius* and *TwinBee* were immaculate. Whatever that formula was, it was impossible for others to imitate. They were momentous, each one, and so rewarding to play – to put the time and effort into mastery." How does Nakazato feel about the high esteem in which Konami's games were held during this time? "Hearing that brings a smile to my face, and I hope that we will continue to be seen that way by fans for the next 20 or 30 years," he says.

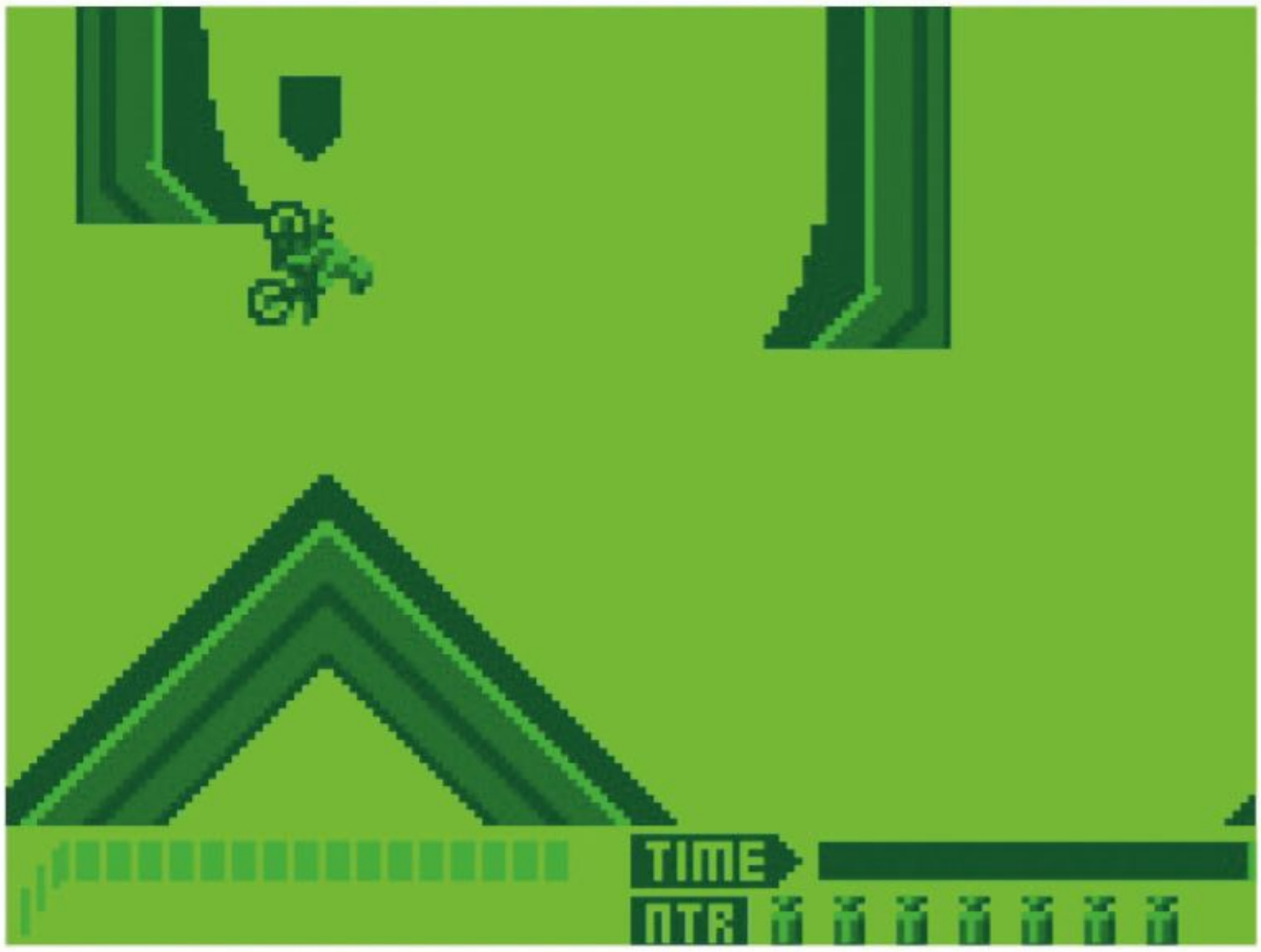
For all the success that Konami was experiencing on consoles, it was still an arcade game manufacturer, and that's where its next major hit series would begin. *Beatmania* thrilled players in Japanese arcades by giving them the chance to play DJ, and the company was right on the forefront of the boom in music games. The company quickly followed up *Beatmania*

» [SNES] Games like Axelay were graphically outstanding.

sequels as well as new games such as *Guitar Freaks* and *DrumMania*, all tied together under a wider Bemani brand. "I *loved* how happy this entire series made people feel. The game centres/arcades were transformed. I did feel like a complete prat hopping around on them myself, but would have such admiration for those that got everything right," says Paul. "It was surprising how swiftly the crowds warmed to the idea of music-oriented coin-ops, and how genuinely 'edgy' and exciting it was when Konami started making versions for the consoles."

The most popular games in the series would ultimately prove to be *Dance Dance Revolution* – or *Dancing Stage*, in its early European releases – and *Beatmania IIDX*. "My fondest memories, though, are of the game *Pop'n Music* because I loved Puffy AmiYumi so much at the time," says Paul. "In the Nineties, you could allow yourself to have whole-hearted fun, as though nothing else mattered. Konami made the world a better place with that series." The Bemani division is still active within Konami and accounts for much of its modern arcade output, so *Pop'n Music* also continues to this day, alongside newer games such as *Jubeat*, *Sound Voltex* and *Nostalgia*.

In the home, Konami was a dependable presence on Saturn and N64, but did its best work of the late Nineties on the PlayStation. The company was turning out great games in existing series like *Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night*, *International Track & Field* and *Gradius Gaiden*, as well as excellent original games such as *Suikoden* and *Vandal Hearts*. Beside those games, the company set itself up for the next generation by transforming one series, reviving another and starting a third. The transformed series was International *Superstar Soccer*, which underwent



» [Game Boy] Konami's Game Boy output shouldn't be overlooked as games like Motocross Maniacs are excellent.

» [Mega Drive] Konami often made bespoke games for each 16-bit system.

» Paul Davies is the former editor of *C&VG* magazine.

"IN THAT ERA, [KONAMI] REPRESENTED SOPHISTICATION ON A LEVEL THAT MY FRIENDS AND I HAD NEVER IMAGINED"

Paul Davies

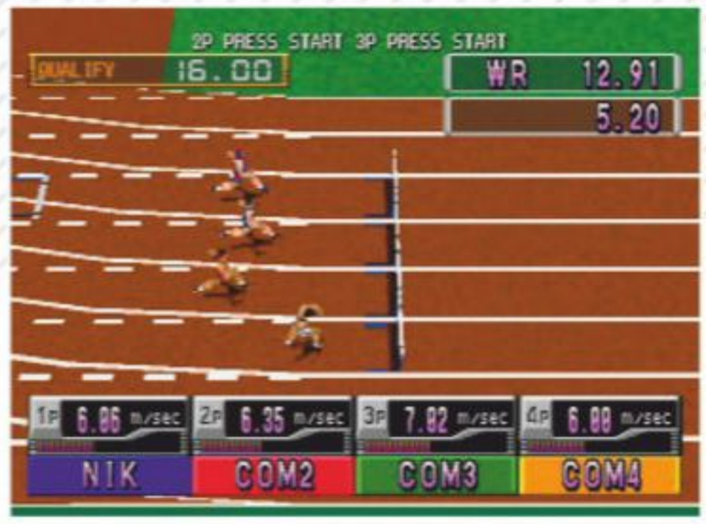
a branding change to *ISS Pro Evolution* as the generation went on – ultimately leading to the retirement of the old brand in favour of the *Pro Evolution Soccer* series we know today.

Konami's biggest game of the generation was an extraordinary return for one of its old MSX properties, *Metal Gear*. The new entry in the series was a fully 3D PlayStation game that expanded the stealth gameplay of its predecessors, with a lavish production including full voice acting and cinematic cutscenes. "In that era, it represented sophistication on a level that my friends and I had never imagined nor knew that we wanted," says Paul. "It had a look and feel, and pacing, and refinement, that most of us didn't associate with videogames." The game received universal acclaim and sold very well, even receiving an expansion pack in the form of *Metal Gear Solid: VR Missions* – a rare achievement for a PlayStation game. Paul even credits it with an increase on the quality of PlayStation games as a whole. "Your game just needed to be better after *Metal Gear Solid* on PlayStation – which was great for gamers, tough on studios and publishers." The success of *Metal Gear Solid* ultimately made a superstar out of its director Hideo Kojima, who quickly became one of the most well-known developers in the business thanks to his ability to frame action and his knack for playing the publicity game.

Metal Gear Solid was packaged with a demo of a game called *Silent Hill*, which turned out to be Konami's biggest new series to debut on the PlayStation. Rather than the traditional formula of a warrior battling monsters that was employed in *Castlevania*, *Silent Hill* used a psychological horror theme. Protagonist Harry Mason was a civilian without much in the way of combat skills or athleticism, and the town of Silent Hill was a modern American town, so the setting was one that players could relate to with ease. Reviewers were bowled over by the atmosphere of the game and it went on to sell over 2 million copies, setting the scene for future entries in the series.

As a result there was a great deal of anticipation around the company's output on the next generation of systems, and Konami capitalised on this by pioneering an early form of crowdfunding. Fans in Japan could buy into 'The Game Fund', which would go towards creating *Tokimeki Memorial 3* and another game (later revealed to be *Tokimeki Memorial: Girls' Side*). It wasn't cheap to invest, as units cost ¥10,000 each and a minimum purchase of ten was required, but these were real investments. Unlike with modern Kickstarter projects, people who bought into The Game Fund were entitled to a share of the profits from the games – Mizuho Securities, one of the companies involved in delivering the scheme, estimated that investors would gain ¥5,500 per unit if the games sold a combined 800,000 copies, and would suffer losses if the combined sales of the two games were under 300,000 units. The fund ultimately raised ¥770 million from over 2,700 investors.

» [Arcade] Even Konami's lesser known games often provide great fun – *Dragoon Might* is a forgotten arcade gem.



» [N64] Despite his niche appeal, Goemon still has his fans in the west.

Elsewhere in the world, attention was focused on how Konami would follow up its PlayStation hits – and players were floored when they actually got a glimpse of what Konami was working on. "The trailer for *Metal Gear Solid 2* left you feeling incredulous, and of course the game itself raised expectations to a place that few publishers ever managed to attain," says Paul, who felt that the game "was earth-shattering on arrival and truly landmark".

Over the course of the generation, *Silent Hill* would develop its identity further with the introduction of new characters and concepts like the iconic Pyramid Head, and *Pro Evolution Soccer* rose to prominence as the primary competitor to EA's *FIFA* series. For Paul, they're a defining part of Konami's output. "I got obsessed with *Pro Evolution Soccer*, which reached its peak around *PES4* and *PES5*. Those titles were sublime, there's no other word for it. I'm going to use the word beautiful as well, though."

Beside its tentpole releases, Konami introduced a number of fascinating new games in the early Noughties. In arcades, the developer tried a variety of different ways to enliven the lightgun genre – *Police 911* had a height sensor that allowed players to physically crouch to avoid shots, and *Warzaid* experimented with an ultra-wide projection screen. On PlayStation 2, the *Zone Of The Enders* games were beautiful if somewhat brief mech battlers, *Shadow Of Memories* offered an unusual time travel adventure and the innovative *Ring Of Red* combined turn-based strategy with real-time combat elements. On the GBA, *Boktai: The Sun Is In Your Hand* took advantage of the portable nature of the hardware by including a solar sensor in the cartridge, which powered up the hero Django's gun.

Moving into the latter half of the Noughties, Konami worked with western developers to create new entries in its older franchises on the DS, including *Contra 4* by WayForward Technologies and *New International Track & Field* by Sumo Digital. The company had a major Japanese hit with *LovePlus*, a DS dating simulator.

The game hit headlines internationally when a Tokyo resident 'married' his favourite character Nene Anegasaki in a ceremony streamed live online – though it wasn't an official or legal marriage, despite being overseen by an actual priest. Meanwhile on the PSP, Konami released excellent retro projects like *Gradius Collection* and *Castlevania: The Dracula X Chronicles*, as well as original games such as *Silent Hill: Origins*. Konami did try to broaden the international appeal of some

"AS THE DEPTH OF WHAT WE CAN DO HAS IMPROVED THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE INVOLVED HAS ALSO INCREASED"

Nobuya Nakazato

» [PS2] Fans love *Metal Gear Solid* games for their refined stealth as much as their bizarre plotlines.

of its Japanese hits at this time, localising the *Jikkyou Power Pro Baseball* series as *MLB Power Pro* and creating the Americanised dating sim Brooktown High, but neither was able to replicate the success of their Japanese counterparts.

Going into the HD era, Konami began to focus even more intently on the likes of *Metal Gear, Silent Hill, Castlevania, Pro Evolution Soccer* and its music games. This resulted in a leaner release schedule, but one which still gave us some absolute classics – PlayStation 3 sales spiked when *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns Of The Patriots* released in 2008, and *Castlevania: Lords Of Shadow* revitalised the series. Konami also added a huge number of classic properties to its catalogue in 2011 when it purchased Hudson Soft, giving the company control of games including *Star Soldier*, *Bomberman*, *Bonk* and a huge chunk of the PC Engine catalogue. The acquisition had taken a long time, beginning in 2001 when Konami purchased 5.6 million shares to become the largest shareholder in Hudson Soft. The deal did involve Konami selling its Sapporo development studio to Hudson Soft in exchange. The company increased its shareholding to a majority stake in 2005, becoming the exclusive distributor for all of Hudson Soft's games. Following the full acquisition in 2011, Konami moved to absorb Hudson's operations into the wider business and retired the old brand completely in 2012.

According to Nakazato, working on games at Konami hasn't changed much over the years. "The basics of the job are pretty much the same as they have always been," he tells us, "but as the depth of what we can do has improved, the number of people involved has also increased, giving us more time to dedicate to the creative side of things. This makes the time management of tasks much more important as well." But while the development process hasn't changed, the target platforms have. Konami's arcade games rarely make it outside of Japan today, though impressive cabinets like *Dancerush Stardom* and *Sound Voltex* can be found at select venues in the western world. Additionally, Konami and Hideo Kojima parted ways under contentious circumstances following the release of *Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain*, resulting in the cancellation of the promising *Silent Hills* project. As a result Konami has been fairly quiet on the home console scene during the current generation, sticking to its proven properties – mostly annual updates of its football and baseball franchises, as well as a *Metal Gear Solid* spin-off, *Metal Gear Survive*. In 2015, the company openly stated that it was shifting to a mobile-first strategy for games.

Despite that, there have been things for Konami fans to be excited about in recent years. The *Power Pro Baseball* series has become the official esports game of the Nippon Professional Baseball league. *Super Bomberman R* became a great case for revisiting games, as it underwent a quiet year-long transformation as extra content was added via free DLC, and included plenty of classic characters like Dracula and Goemon. And with the company now celebrating its history as it reaches its 50th anniversary, Konami has released retro-themed digital compilations including the *Castlevania Requiem* bundle and this year's *Anniversary Collections*, as well as the brilliantly celebratory picross game *Pixel Puzzle Collection* on mobile.

So if it's fair to say that fans have wanted to see more of Konami on home consoles lately, that itself is a testament to its legacy in the gaming world. The compilations highlight how great the Konami games of the Eighties and Nineties were, and the fact that fans crave more from franchises like *Castlevania*, *Contra* and *Silent Hill* is proof of how much those games mattered to them and the wider gaming world. Whatever Konami does over the coming years, its contributions over the first 50 years of its existence have secured it a crowing place in gaming history.

BEYOND VIDEOGAMES

You might be aware that Konami has business interests outside of the videogames industry – here's a look at some of those

Though Konami doesn't publish nearly as many home console games as it used to, the company is still a very large business because it has many interests. Most of these are connected to its heritage in gaming and amusement. For example, Konami Digital Entertainment – the bit that is primarily responsible for videogames – also handles the popular *Yu-Gi-Oh!* trading card game, while Konami Amusement does pachislot machines as well as Bemani arcade games.

Konami Gaming is the side of the business that handles machines for gambling establishments, from regular slot machines to elaborate systems like the Fortune Cup mechanical horse racing game. Some of these are even themed around videogames, including *Castlevania: Valiant Guardian*, *Frogger: Great City Wilds* and *Neo Contra: Warrior Reloaded*. The company also promotes a system called Synkros, which is a tool for casino management.

Where the company deviates from its other interests is in its sports and fitness clubs. These were operated by People Corporation, which began as a single store in Nishinomiya in the Seventies and rapidly expanded during the Nineties. Konami acquired the company in 2001, and operates dozens of facilities across Japan. The company even sponsors the Konami Sports gymnastic and swimming team, which includes Olympic medallists such as Kohei Uchimura, gold medallist in men's individual all-around gymnastics at London 2012 and Rio 2016.

» *Yu-Gi-Oh!* is a huge franchise for Konami, especially the TCG.

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» [C64] Duck Dodgers discovers deep discomfort on Mars.

» Ashley Routledge (above) and Dave Saunders (below), the developers of *Daffy Duck*.

DAFFY DUCK AND THE GREAT PAINT CAPER

In 1992 Hi-Tec was poised to have the cantankerous black duck star in his own game, but it never saw the light of day... that is, until recently

Words by Andrew Fisher

IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** HI-TEC

» **DEVELOPER:** DIGITAL DESIGN

» **SYSTEM:** C64

» **DUE FOR RELEASE:** 1992

Daffy Duck's love of costumes, alongside *Looney Tunes'* roster of colourful characters, held plenty of promise for a videogame. Digital Design, made up of programmer Dave Saunders and artist Ashley Routledge, took on the challenge of making *Daffy Duck And The Great Paint Caper* for the Commodore 64. "Ash and I had done a few other games for Hi-Tec and were offered *Daffy Duck*, which we were very pleased with as he was such an iconic cartoon character," says Dave. "I don't recall an actual design document but I think we must have had something to reference as I do not remember coming up with the level ideas and puzzle sequences. We did not have a 16-bit machine in the office, so goodness knows how we managed!"

Ashley Routledge loved working with the characters. "*Daffy Duck* was a bigger game than usual for Hi-Tec [for the new Premier range] and we were all excited about the project. When they offered the game to us we accepted straight away. We were given quite a lot of reference material in the post for all the Warner Brothers games, line art printouts and photocopies (there was no internet then). I particularly liked making the loading screen, characters and backgrounds." Adding to the backgrounds were neat parallax effects and animated characters. Ash explains, "All the background animations, including water and parallax layers, were achieved by scrolling repeatable sections of artwork through a small section of characters (for example, a 2x2 or 4x4 character repeatable block). The artwork was drawn to repeat in whichever direction it needed to scroll, then we'd move it with code."

The game has seven levels, starting in the studios. Daffy must pick up and use objects at the right place, talking to other characters using a dialogue menu to gain clues or trade objects. We then move into the sewers, where Daffy must find the key to unlock the final door. In the desert, Speedy Gonzales demands Daffy find the pieces of a rocket.

The country section features a farm along with Foghorn Leghorn, the city has a complicated series of object trades with multiple characters, and the jungle saw Daffy trying to get past the natives. On the final Mars level,

» [C64] Wile E Coyote, Roadrunner and Speedy Gonzalez are all encountered in the Desert level.

» Daffy talks to Porky Pig, with several speech options that the player can choose from.

OR YOU COULD PLAY...

LOONEY TUNES

1999, SUNSOFT

■ Daffy is one of seven playable *Looney Tunes* characters in this platformer, split into short stages and filled with familiar tropes. There are tricky jumps and end-of-level bosses to conquer (including Yosemite Sam, Marvin The Martian and Elmer Fudd).

TINY TOONS ADVENTURES – BUSTER BUSTS LOOSE

1992, KONAMI

■ This mixes the SNES skills of Konami with the star of *Tiny Toons*. The Dash bar mechanic and switches add a lot to the action, alongside a roster of memorable bosses.

TAZ-MANIA

1992, RECREATIONAL BRAINWARE

■ Taz The Tasmanian Devil seeks the Lost Valley, where giant seabirds lay eggs – so he can make a huge omelette. Taz can use his tornado spin to defate enemies, and he also eats objects in his path – the peppers make him breathe fire!

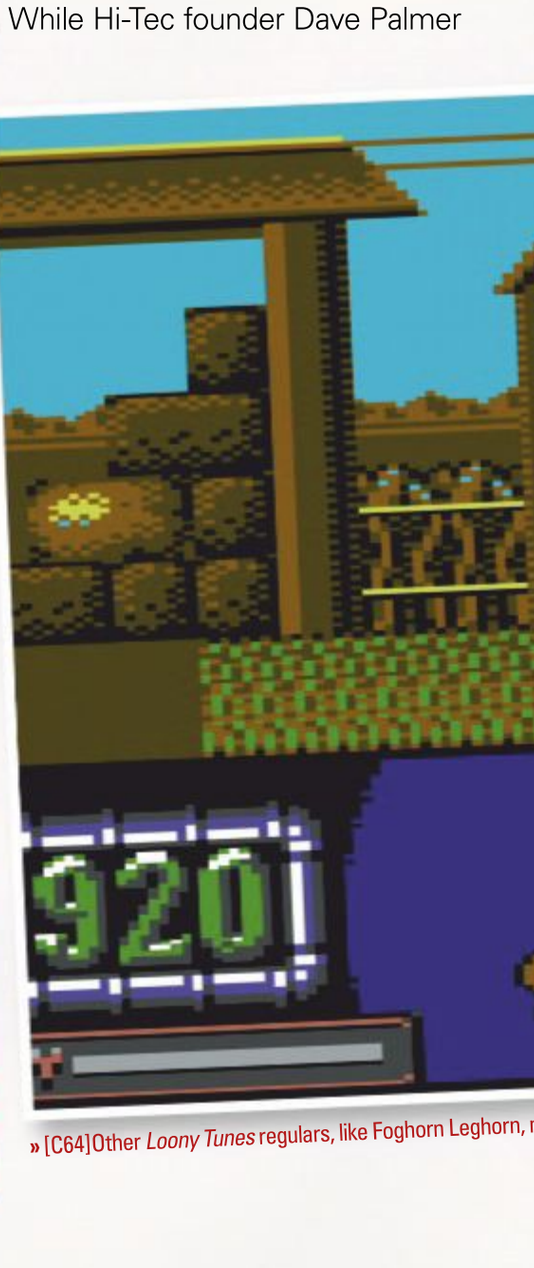
» [C64] Nick Taylor's *Bugs Bunny* game (with graphics by Ashley Routledge) was also recovered by Games That Weren't.

> "Hi-Tec were great and paid us, even though they were having difficulties"
> Ashley Routledge

Daffy (as Duck Dodgers) must defeat Marvin the Martian. Ash comments, "The levels were quite elaborate from what I remember, compared to previous games. The biggest difference was the physical memory size for this game, which required two disks and a new loading system."

When *ZZAP!* reviewed a near-complete build of *Daffy Duck* in issue 87, the 94% Sizzler and map of the sewers whetted readers' appetites. Dave says, "*ZZAP!* was such a great magazine. We wanted to create games that would grace those pages and get reviewed by the likes of Julian Rignall and Richard Eddy. The *ZZAP!* review for *Daffy* was great, apparently the highest score a Hi-Tec game had ever received!" Ash still has his original copy of the review. "That meant everything to us. We always checked all the magazines in newsagents for reviews and were huge fans of *ZZAP!* and the journalists who wrote for the magazine."

Sadly Hi-Tec went into administration soon after, halting the release of *Daffy Duck*, a *Bugs Bunny* game in development and *Turbo The Tortoise* (later released by Codemasters). Dave admits, "We had a great deal of respect for Dave Palmer and what he had achieved with Hi-Tec. We had done a lot of work for them so it was a blow when he told us the news. We had hoped the game would somehow be sold on and released but it never happened." Ash adds, "Hi-Tec were great and paid us, even though they were having difficulties. For the game not to be published was hugely disappointing, especially after the good reviews."

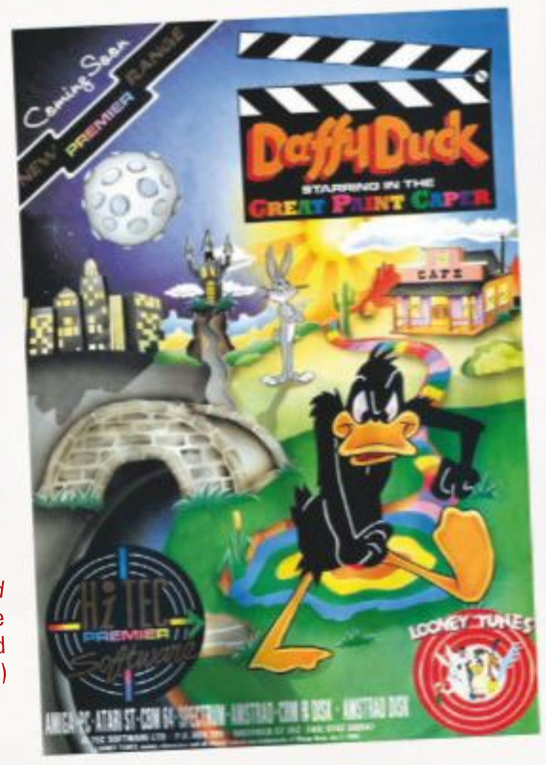


» [C64] Exploring the sewers requires finding the switches that turn off electric barriers.

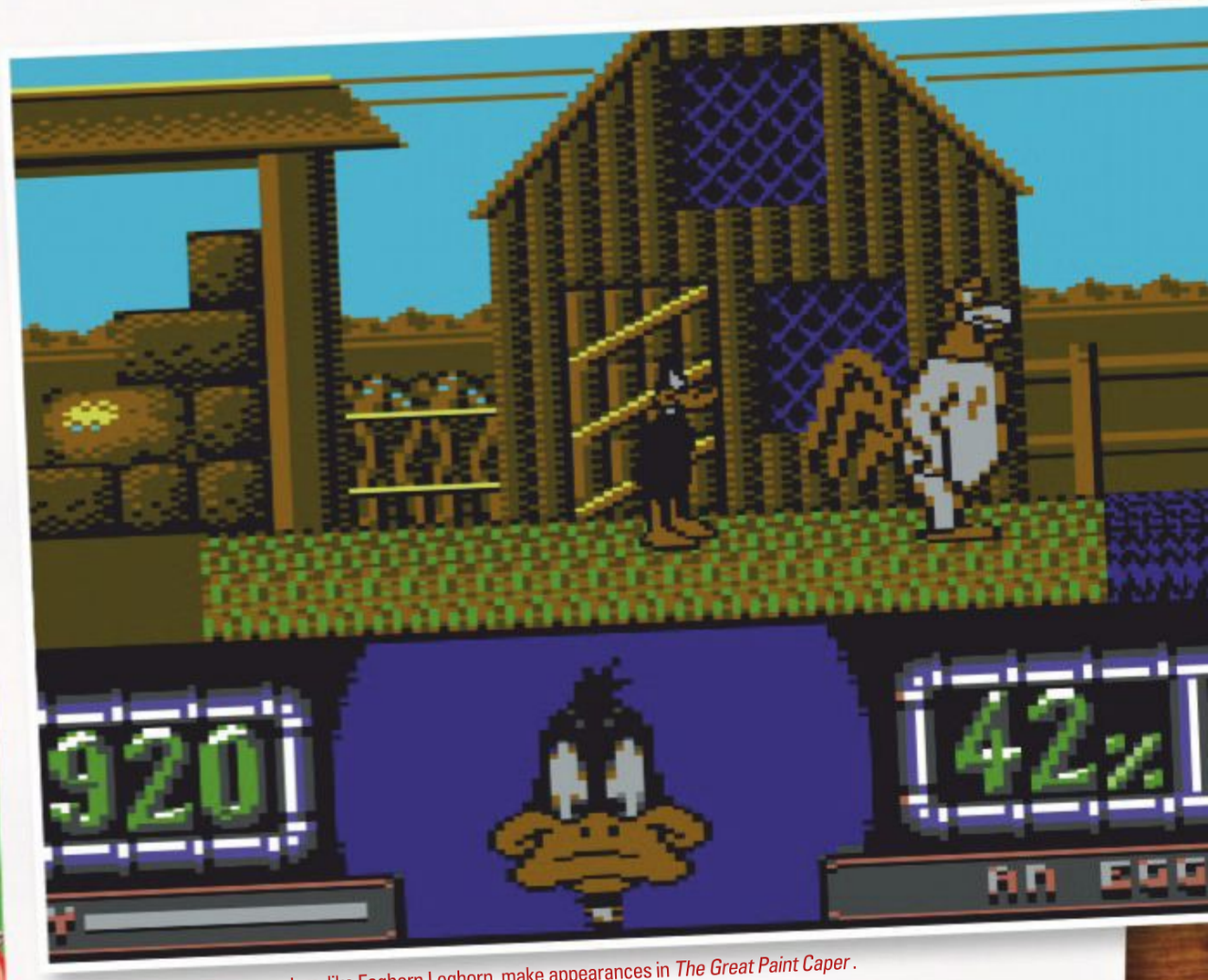
Enter Frank Gasking of Games That Weren't (gtw64.co.uk). He has specialised in tracking down unreleased games, and had already found the C64 *Bugs Bunny* game with help from programmer Nick Taylor, but *Daffy Duck* remained elusive. While Hi-Tec founder Dave Palmer and Dave Saunders no longer had any assets, Ash discovered several C64 floppy disks related to *Daffy Duck* in August 2015. He says, "Frank took the whole lot and painstakingly went through the disks which included a lot of development material."

These disks had the PDS (Programmer's Development System) files for *Daffy*. PDS allowed programmers to develop on a PC and transmit code down a cable to the target machine. To get the game running, hacker Martin Pugh needed a particular 6502 library. While there were PDS assets online, that library had not been archived. Fortunately Frank found and preserved the necessary files among Ash's 3.5-inch PC disks just in time – the magnetic layer on one disk had almost completely degraded.

Ash and Dave have not played the recovered game yet, but Dave says, "I enjoyed looking through YouTube videos, which brought back memories of making it. It really was an extensive game!" ✱



» The ad for *Daffy Duck And The Great Paint Caper*. (Image courtesy of Frank Gasking and David A Palmer Productions)



» [C64] Other *Loony Tunes* regulars, like Foghorn Leghorn, make appearances in *The Great Paint Caper*.

ULTIMATE GUIDE: SOLOMON'S KEY

Idiosyncratic and quirky, those that persevered with this Tecmo game found themselves falling in love with its blend of cute fantasy characters and unusual game design. Retro Gamer readies its wand to reveal more on this underrated gem

Words by Graeme Mason

A quick glance at the list of arcade games released in 1986 reveals a few surprises, and demonstrates an industry that was at least attempting to bring some originality to its product. In among the customary roster of shoot-'em-ups (*Salamander*), driving games (*Out Run*) and run-and-gunners (*Ikari Warriors*), is a selection of imaginative titles that were distinctly different from the rest. In a virtual arcade where the aforementioned genres are banned, you would be able to include the likes of skateboarding sim *720°*, *Breakout* upgrade *Arkanoid*, *Bubble Bobble* and the urban destruction of *Rampage*. And nestled between these iconic cabs, a magical hue emanating from its incongruous artwork would sit Tecmo's *Solomon's Key*.

Formerly known as Tekhan, Tecmo's biggest hits before 1986 had been the explosive platformer *Bomb Jack* and football arcade sim *Tekhan World Cup*. The former's creator, Michitaka Tsuruta, was determined to create another original game design, one that would mix genres to form something new and refreshing. Partly inspired by *Lode Runner*, the designer twisted the famous Brøderbund game, adding a fantasy theme and focusing on creating blocks rather than digging holes.

Solomon's Key is the story of a wizard called Dana, who has the small task of saving the world from a horde of demons. Accidentally released by an undefined incident, these monsters pepper the world which Dana ventures into in order to reset the eponymous seal that protects all of existence. Summoned by the fairies, Dana, dressed in a green cloak and time-worn pointy hat, must enter 12 chambers, each containing a collection of increasingly oblique screens. The chief goal of every screen is to collect its glistening key which opens the exit to the next level, taking the hero a step closer to Solomon's chamber. Also littered around is a range of items that Dana must collect in order to aid his progress. These include fireball spells, score bonus symbols and a bell, the collection of which releases

» [Arcade] You need a lot of points to earn your third life.

CONVERSION CAPERS

Which of the ports were burning classics, and which were misfires?

AMSTRAD CPC

■ Not a great deal was expected of US Gold and Probe's conversion, given the pair's recent collaborations for the 8-bit computers, and while the weaker of the three, this Amstrad port is still passably fun and colourful. Only some slightly juddering controls let it down.

ZX SPECTRUM

■ Coded by Raff Cecco, working freelance for Probe Software, this version contains the coder's usual neat graphics and impressive gameplay. The arcade game's sprites are replicated well, but much of its colour is inexplicably lost.

COMMODORE 64

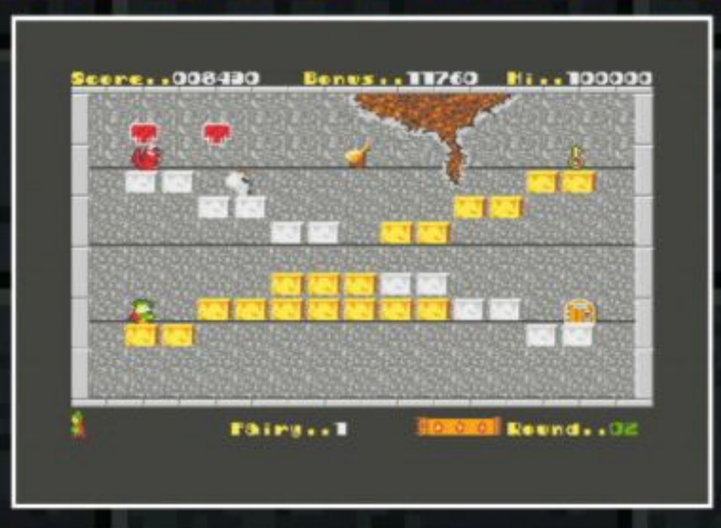
■ Edging out its 8-bit home computer peers, this is a solid port. The graphics are functional, rather than outstanding, but there's much enjoyment to be had from the zippy gameplay. It also got a rare thumbs up from the *Zzap!64* reviewers.

NES

■ Coded by the original arcade team, this NES port has colourful graphics and tight, responisive controls. On a console full of platformers, *Solomon's Key* is a refreshing must for NES fans, and it even matches its hero on the box art (something the home computer versions didn't do).

MASTER SYSTEM

■ This Sega port of *Solomon's Key*, is a little curio. Released only in Japan as *Solomon No Kagi*, its publisher, Salio, was essentially a dummy corporation created by Tecmo to enable it to sidestep Nintendo's exclusivity policies. It's another decent port, though not as good as the NES game.



ATARI ST

■ While Dana's block-making/destroying range is oddly longer, much of the original game is replicated faithfully here by Probe and US Gold. With a squatter screen display, the game feels claustrophobic in places, but it's a good stab and well worth investigating.

DOS

■ Like many PC games of the Eighties, *Solomon's Key* is a bit of a horror show visually, despite a laudable attempt at recreating the screens accurately. Fortunately it plays okay, with the main character moving well and the core gameplay intact, but it's still demanding on the eyes.

PLAYING TIPS

Learn how to beat Soloman's Key

BLOCK PRODUCTION

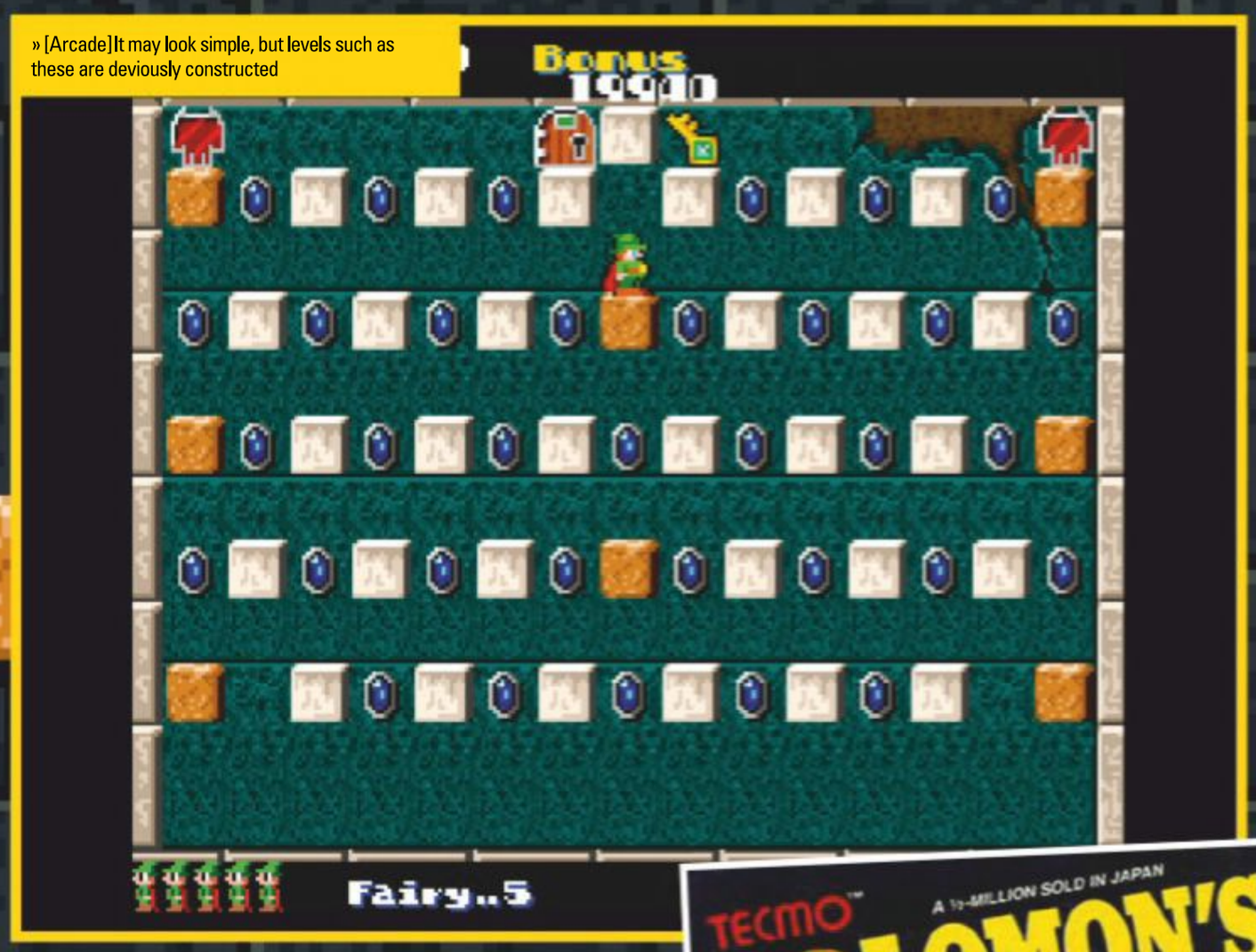
■ Dana is pretty nifty at creating blocks. Not only does pointing to the left or right create one right in front of him, if he crouches down, he can also plug holes in the floor. The cunning wizard can even magic up blocks while sailing through the air, which comes in useful more often than you would typically think.

DIFFERENT METHODS

■ Each screen in *Soloman's Key* can be tackled differently, although generally there is one obvious solution. Take this first level: the turtle in the centre can be avoided completely, or dropped to its doom by taking out the block beneath it. As long as you acquire that key, the door will be open and escape is possible.

EXPERIMENT FOR BONUSES

■ *Solomon's Key* encourages the player to experiment within its levels, creating blocks and then destroying them to reveal hidden bonuses. The best way to chase high scores is to learn the layouts of the game's stages and pocket these hidden extras, which also include helpful extra lives and fireballs.



» [Arcade] It may look simple, but levels such as these are deviously constructed

» [Arcade] These mages pepper the latter levels, creating blocks and mayhem of their own.

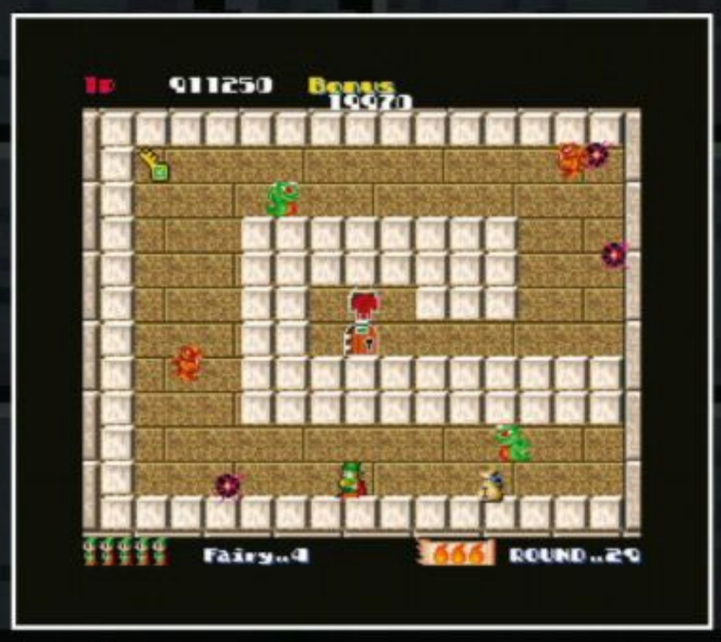
TECMO
A 1½-MILLION SOLD IN JAPAN
SOLOMON'S KEY
Unlock Solomon's Secrets
THIS GAME IS LICENSED BY NINTENDO FOR PLAY ON THE ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM

> "The sound effects are great and it has some really novel design elements"
>
> Raffaele Cecco

▶ a fairy who can be rescued for extra points, and because it's a nice thing to do.

Naturally, each level houses a progressively devious variety of enemies. Often respawning, and always deadly to the touch, these creatures can be eliminated by the fireballs that Dana stores and unleashes with a tap of the fire button. The key weapon in the wizard's armoury, however, is his golden wand: wave it at a vacant space and it summons a block. Use it on one of the many brown blocks that appear in every level and the block is destroyed, sometimes revealing a bonus item behind it. While Dana can also destroy blocks above him with his head, it is with this block-creating ability that he can negotiate his way around each level, rescuing fairies, collecting bonuses and progressing to the next stage. Different strategies can be adopted to combat each of the complex levels. For example, deadly sparks, which run along walls and blocks can either be contained, blocked off or simply avoided. Blocks can also be used to temporarily obstruct other enemies or destroyed underneath them to eliminate them via falling. In the time-honoured fashion, the early screens offer a simple, uncluttered path to the exit. Yet after a mere handful of levels, the player will be confronted with claustrophobic, enemy-infested puzzles that require both manual and mental dexterity in order to solve.

Fortunately there is help at hand, and often on the tip of Dana's powerful wand. Rather than a spell book, the wizard holds a magical scroll,



MY HEART IS A FIREBALL

■ Fireballs are Dana's primary defence against the assorted nasties, and are best conserved for his hour of need. Initially the wizard's scroll can only store three, but this can be expanded with the right power-ups. The constantly respawning enemies somewhat neuter their effect, but you never know when you might get cornered.

MOBILE WIZARDRY

■ Dana is a very spry chap, capable of leaping up and across two blocks at a time. Enemies can also be jumped over (albeit cautiously) and even his direction altered mid-flight. He's no slouch on the ground either, and will need all of these skills and more in the face of the game's incessant deluge of opponents.

FAIL TO PREPARE, PREPARE TO FAIL

■ It's important to always remember that *Solomon's Key* is, at its heart, a puzzle game rather than a platforming adventure such as *Super Mario*. Each of the game's screen has a particular path, of which there is normally one correct way of tackling. Choose unwisely and Dana could end up stuck... or worse.

PIXEL PERFECT

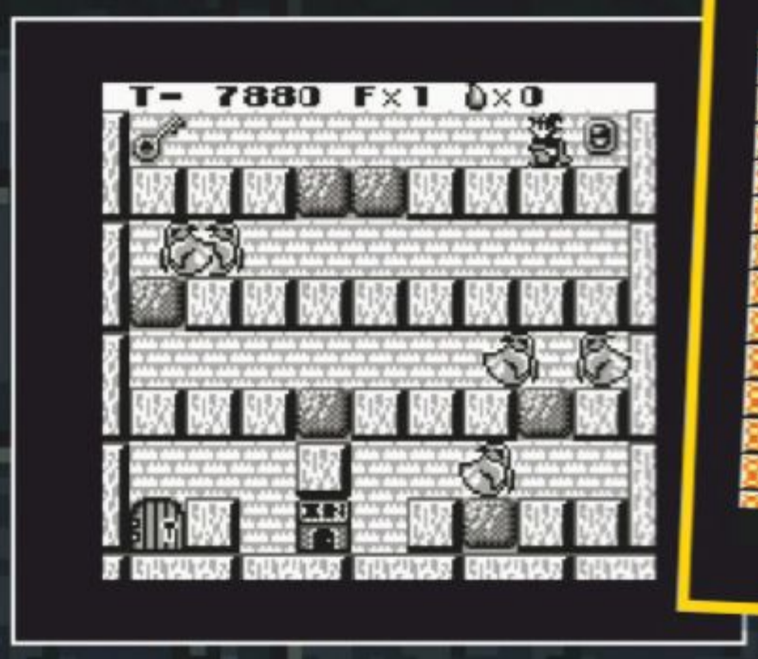
The strange things you'll encounter in the 12 chambers

CONTINUING THE ADVENTURE

If you're after more Soloman's Key, you're in luck

Originally developed as a separate, new IP, the NES title *Fire 'N' Ice* was morphed into a *Solomon's Key* prequel in 1992 when that game became a success for Tecmo on the Nintendo console. Taking its cue from the Game Boy's *Catrap*, AKA *Pitman*, *Fire 'N' Ice* ramps up the puzzle elements as Dana extinguishes flames throughout each level using his ice-creating wand. Loose ice blocks can be pushed and slid (giving the game an added *Pengo* dimension) while blocks formed in midair fall to eliminate fires below. While fans of *Solomon's Key* may find the lack of a jump annoying, *Fire 'N' Ice* is a fantastic game, with a charming central character and a real sense of achievement when some of the trickier stages are solved. An actual sequel to *Solomon's Key* had already appeared in 1991 on Nintendo's Game Boy. *Solomon's Club* replicates its predecessor's gameplay far more accurately over its five levels, each containing ten rooms. The ability to select your starting level is a big plus, and despite a cluttered display, it's a sound, if overfamiliar, tread once more into the world of *Solomon's Key*.

» [Arcade] Dragons must be approached with caution, unless you fancy being toasted.



» [Arcade] Dana contemplates the nimble platforming skill and fireballs needed to traverse this stage.

"I had this humongous arcade machine delivered to my living room!"

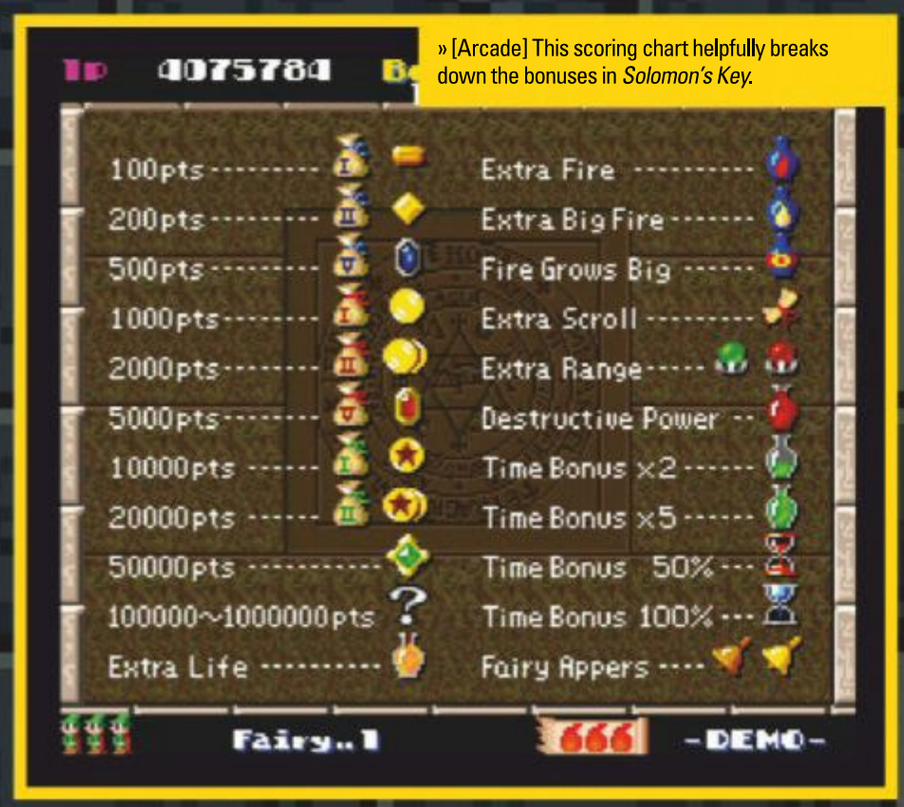
Raffaele Cecco

within which he can hold three destructive fireball spells, used to eradicate enemies that obstruct his path. Parchment extensions increase the amount of spells Dana can hold, while picking up a fire potion increases his fireballs by one. A super fire potion gives the wizard a souped-up fireball while the fire growth potion upgrades a spare regular fireball into a super one. Also, each fireball will travel a certain distance before dissipating; collecting green and red jewels extends this further, yielding even more destruction. Rounding off the standard pickups are a pair of hourglasses, one usefully restoring all time to the level's meter while the other, coloured a more foreboding crimson, puts the time at half the original allocated amount, a boon when low on time, but to be avoided at the start of a screen.

Finally, two more elixirs, one red, the other orange, destroy all enemies on-screen and give the wizard an extra life respectively. In addition to these collectables are hidden bonus items, each bestowing the player a mega score bonus. Alas, they are tricky to discover, concealed behind blocks or even in the scenery itself, only apparent when a block is created and broken over them. Miss one of these and it will never appear again. Standing in Dana's way stand a range of opponents from the imagination of Michitaka Tsuruta. Whirling demon heads drop from the monster spawn nests; hideous gargoyles breathe fire, as do dragons and salamanders. Green and orange slime gloops around the stone walls and floors while sparks travel across all surfaces, stopping only when they fatally touch Dana.

Curiously, the NES version of *Solomon's Key* was developed alongside the arcade game by the Tecmo team. Unlike many NES arcade conversions, the gameplay remains more-or-less the same despite

» [Arcade] Elegant background graphics feature on many of *Solomon's Key*'s screens.



» [Arcade] This scoring chart helpfully breaks down the bonuses in *Solomon's Key*.

» [Arcade] Skill is needed to navigate this particular stage.

an odd alternate opening level and the addition of some eclectic items such as 12 zodiac panels, golden wings that warp the player forward six levels and, in a hard-to-find cameo, Mighty Bomb Jack himself. Home conversions to the Amstrad, Atari ST, PC, C64 and Spectrum computers also followed, developed by Probe Software and its publishing partner, US Gold. Rounding up the releases of the time is the Sega Master System port which, like the NES game, was created by Tecmo itself, and is very similar to the Nintendo game. The inevitable Virtual Console version came to the Wii in 2006 before finally, in 2013 3DS gamers finally got their chance to rescue fairies and save the world by destroying and creating blocks.

From an era not always renowned for originality, Tecmo's *Solomon's Key* represents a fascinating exception, when developers were willing to try something different. Within each shrewdly crafted level lays a route that must be discovered, with each subsequent screen more challenging. Not with pure reflexes and muscle memory can the player succeed here: a quick mind and eye for an escape route are the only way to guide this brave wizard to the final seal and pull the world back from the brink of darkness.

Q&A RAFFAELE CECCO

We chat to the prolific Spectrum coder about his conversion of Solomon's Key for Probe and US Gold

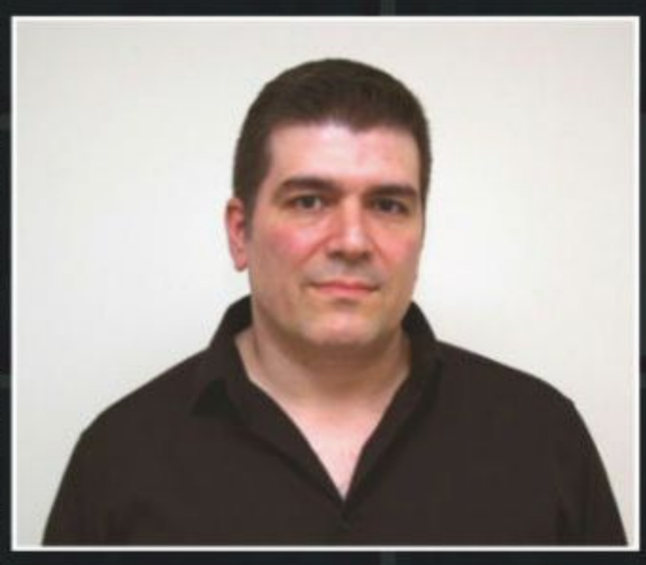
How did you come to work with Probe?
It was a fairly small industry at the time, and I'd chatted to Fergus McGovern – owner of Probe, sadly deceased in 2016 – about the possibility of freelance work. He knew about my Hewson Consultants titles so it was just a case of waiting for the opportunity to come up.

Did you work with anyone else when creating *Solomon's Key*?
All of the coding was done by myself, although I don't remember if I had any help with the graphics or if they supplied the original graphics for me to copy. Certainly, the ZX Spectrum graphics look like my style.

What did you think of the arcade game?
I wasn't familiar with it, and I really liked it when I played it. It's a really neat platform/puzzle game – the kind of thing I liked to design myself. The sound effects are great and it has some really novel design elements. I believe I may have pinched a couple of ideas for my own games, for example, the weird aliens that track around the edges of the platforms appeared in *Cybernoid II*.

How did the conversion process work for you?
Basically, I had this humongous arcade machine delivered to my living room! I just played the game from start to finish, taking notes and sketches or photos as I went along. Luckily, the game is composed of conveniently grid-based static screens with no scrolling, so replication of the level layouts was quite easy.

You were famous back then for your brilliant original games – what was it like working on a licensed game, converting someone else's design?
It was a nice break not to have to think about designing anything! I just coded what I saw. I found this much easier than designing a game



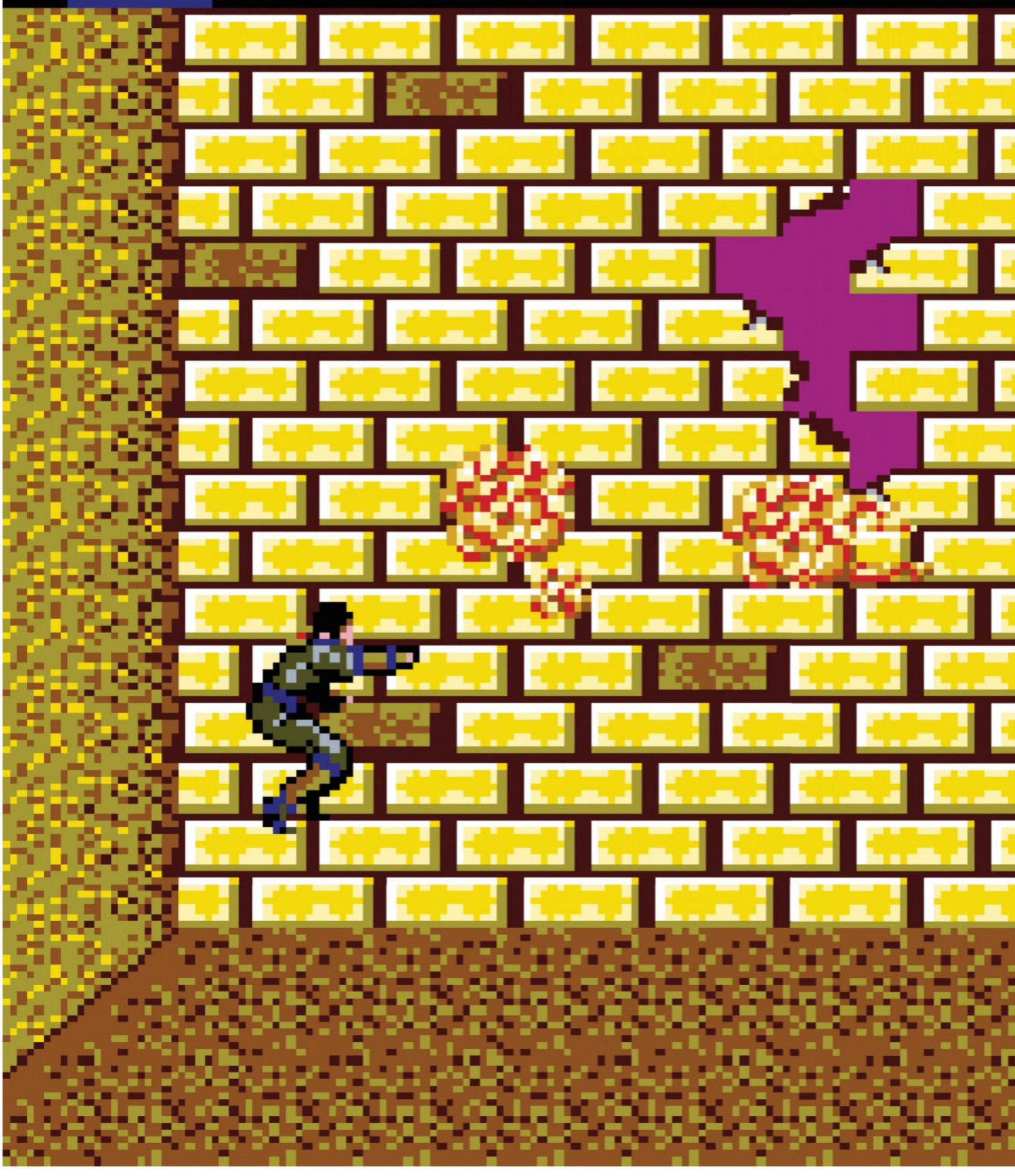
and coding it. In fact, I wish I'd done more arcade conversions like *Solomon's Key* – my life would have been a lot less stressful. I don't think it took longer than three months, whereas something like *Cybernoid* was more like nine.

Were there any converting issues?
Not really – it was a perfect game for conversion to the Spectrum, with its static screens and grid-based level layouts, so no problems with performance or worrying about colour attribute clashing. There were a few sprites on the screen and that was about it. Each level was converted faithfully and there were no compromises in terms of gameplay. I may have missed a few of the later levels, but there were ample levels for a ZX Spectrum game.

How do you think you did in retrospect?
I was really pleased with *Solomon's Key* as I thought I captured the arcade machine gameplay faithfully. The original is a brilliantly designed game, somewhat underrated in my opinion, so it was very educational being able to scrutinise it so closely for a while. And obviously, having a big arcade machine in the living room was quite a talking point, too – especially on freeplay!

SCORE 54400

LIFE



Shinobi

"IT'S JUST LIKE PLAYING THE ARCADE GAME"

» MASTER SYSTEM » 1988 » SEGA R&D2

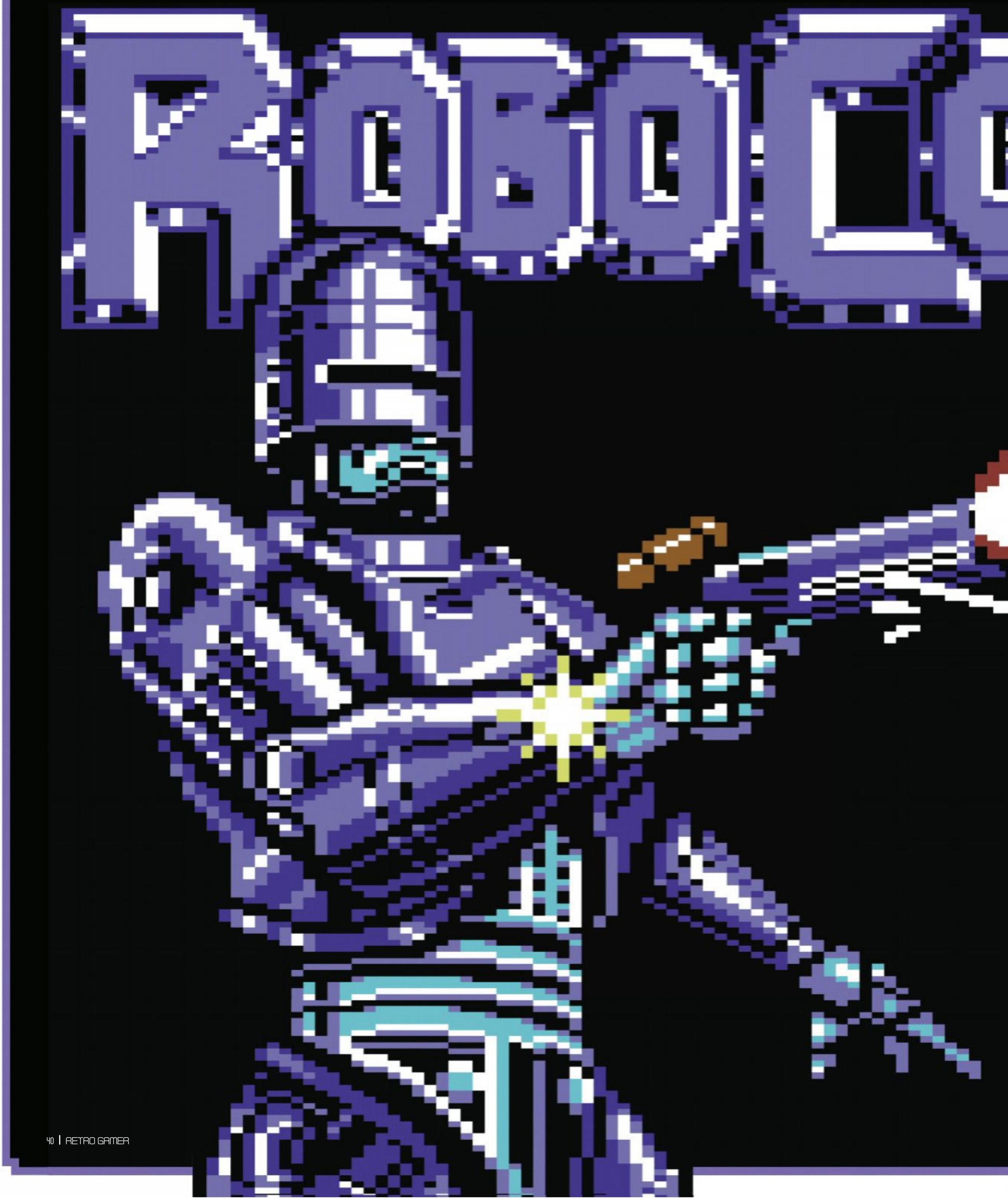
I loved playing *Shinobi* in the arcades. It was one of the first games that I was genuinely good at and I got banned from the coin-op in our local Circle K convenience store because a single ten pence would get me right through to the end of the game.

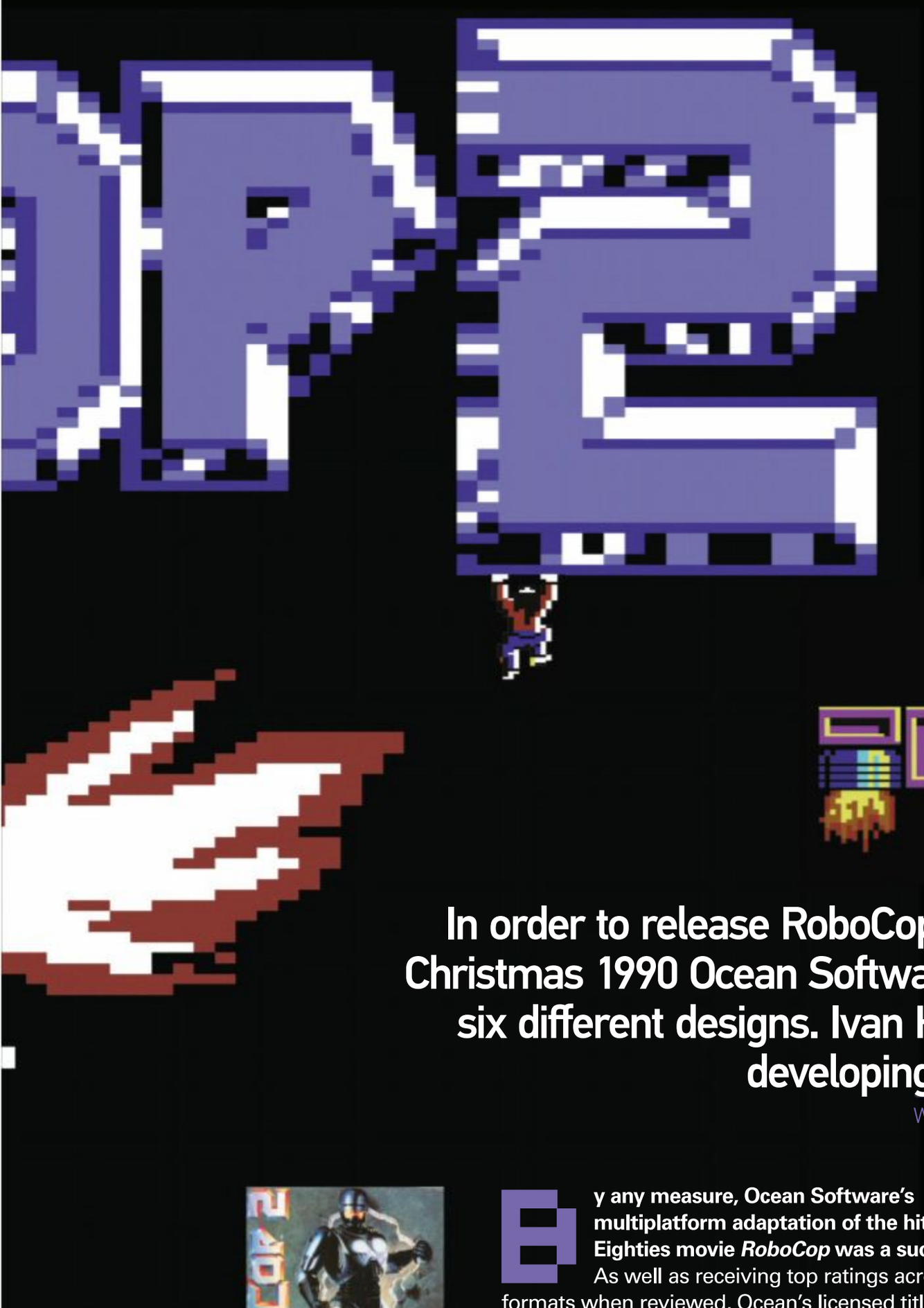
Needless to say, when I decided to buy a Sega Master System, *Shinobi* was the very first game I purchased for it. I was working at Gateway at the time and would tease my friends who were at university because I had a swanky new games console on the way and they were still using their Spectrums and Amigas. "Wait until you play *Shinobi*, Paul," I would say to my best mate. "It's just like playing the arcade game."

When *Shinobi* turned up alongside my Master System, I excitedly loaded it up like the eager 15-year-old I was. The title screen appeared and I hastily stabbed the start button – only to find that it was not like the arcade game at all. Granted, the level structure was largely identical and many of the enemies and bosses were all present and correct, but that's where the similarities ended. *Shinobi* in the arcades was a fast-paced experience, where one wrong move meant instant death for hero, Joe Musashi. *Shinobi* on the Master System was a more sedate affair where even getting hit didn't matter as Joe now had a generously large energy bar.

The sprites looked puny compared to those featured in the arcade game, while the magic attacks and animations were nowhere near as spectacular. The bonus stage was a faithful recreation, and did look very good, but, ultimately, *Shinobi* on Master System was a very different beast. I learned to enjoy it, but I knew it wasn't as good as I'd been boasting, and I knew Paul knew too. "You're right, Darran," he told me after one particular session with a mischievous look in his eye. "It's just like playing the arcade game."

THE MAKING OF





» [GX4000] Unlike the Spectrum version, the interior levels of the GX4000 are single-screen stages.

In order to release RoboCop 2 across seven formats in time for Christmas 1990 Ocean Software employed three teams that created six different designs. Ivan Horn and Mark Rogers look back at developing the 8-bit versions

Words by Rory Milne

IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** OCEAN SOFTWARE

» **DEVELOPER:** OCEAN SOFTWARE, SPECIAL FX, VARIOUS

» **RELEASED:** 1990

» **PLATFORM:** VARIOUS

» **GENRE:** RUN-AND-GUN

By any measure, Ocean Software's multiplatform adaptation of the hit Eighties movie *RoboCop* was a success. As well as receiving top ratings across formats when reviewed, Ocean's licensed title broke every record by staying at number one in the games charts for 18 months. The Spectrum and Amstrad CPC versions were designed by coder Mike Lamb, but as former Ocean artist Ivan Horn explains, the design of *RoboCop*'s inevitable return to Sinclair and Amstrad systems was given to him instead. "I think Mike Lamb left Ocean after working on the *Batman* game," Ivan ponders, "so by the time that work started on *RoboCop 2,* he was either gone or known to be going. Andrew Deakin and I had always worked together as a team to that point, in so far as I'd been the only artist he'd worked with. So I think that might have led to the decision to have us be the sole artist and coder on the projects."

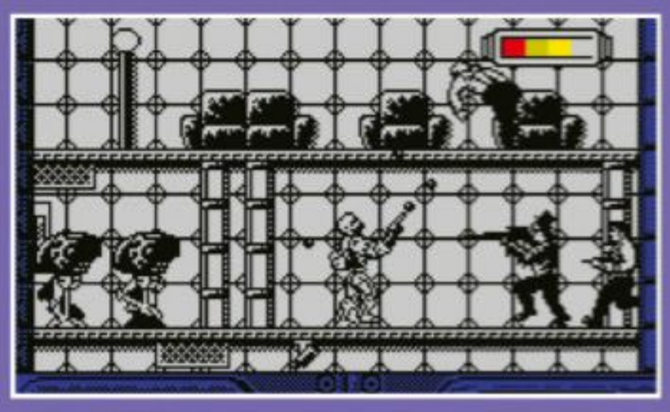
Unlike *RoboCop*, however, Ivan and Andrew's sequel was destined for the 128 model Spectrum and the Amstrad GX4000 console rather than the systems' predecessors. "Most likely the reason for the decision not to do a CPC 464 version was that there was already a long list of platforms being planned for the game," Ivan notes. "So adding another Amstrad version might have been too much, even if the 464 was an established system. I don't remember there being a specific reason for going 128-only on the Spectrum for *RoboCop 2*. Most likely it was just time to drop the 48K Spectrum, to free our hands a bit in developing."

On the design of the ZX Spectrum version of *RoboCop 2*, Ivan has forgotten why the game's core run-and-gun/platformer levels switched between indoor and outdoor locations, but he offers a likely theory. "I don't remember if there was a specific scene in *RoboCop 2* that provided inspiration for this mechanic," Ivan considers, "but certainly *RoboCop* smashing through walls was something that occurred in the first movie. Additionally, in many ways, *RoboCop 2* was a typical Ocean 'crates-and-barrels background, protagonist-with-a-gun' type of game, so we probably just wanted new gameplay features to bring new life to the formula."

The artist has a clearer memory of his Spectrum sequel's memory restoration puzzles, however, which he based on a key plot point from the *RoboCop 2* movie. "In part, we just wanted to break the game up with something different

CLASSIC MOMENTS

The very best bits from the 8-bit versions



ZX SPECTRUM 128

CENTRUM FIREFIGHT

■ The Spectrum version's opening stage has too many criminals and not enough power-ups, but its Civic Centrum level is perfectly balanced. It throws bad guys at you from all directions as the energy bar pick-ups rain down, which produces an intense firefight as you ascend the building.

GX4000

HAZARDOUS HOVERPADS

■ There's a sheer drop in the GX4000 iteration's first level with a magnet hanging over it, which carries RoboCop through the air and drops him. This seems counterintuitive, but the hoverpad he lands on shortly after allows you to pilot him upwards through a series of gun emplacements.

GX4000

PUNISHING PLATFORMING

■ The penultimate stage of the rock-hard GX4000 version is just as tough as you would expect. Its six floors of fearsome platforming feature lightning strikes, cycling lasers, missile launchers and deadly floors. The level really does have to be played for its difficulty to be believed.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

OPERATION WOLF
SYSTEM: AMSTRAD CPC, ZX SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1988

RUN THE GAUNTLET
SYSTEM: ZX SPECTRUM, COMMODORE 64, AMSTRAD CPC
YEAR: 1989

THE ADDAMS FAMILY
(PICTURED)
SYSTEM: AMSTRAD CPC ZX SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1992

from the side-scrolling action," Ivan reasons. "But also it helped to tie the game into the less action-based parts of both movies a bit better, specifically those related to RoboCop/Alex Murphy's deleted memory and his battle to recover some memory of his old life, as well as control of his new one."

A second side-challenge was added to the Spectrum follow-up in the form of a shooting range stage, where impressive performances would reduce the hit-counts of criminals in the subsequent level. "Most likely this was to give the shooting range sections more significance in terms of the overall game," Ivan explains. "We could have just made them 'beat a score to continue', or just a high score table entry type of thing. However we chose this option to give the section a reason to be in the game, other than just adding it for the sake of variety."

Then when considering the Spectrum *RoboCop 2*'s finale, Ivan looked to early footage of the film for inspiration and produced a memorable and cinematic boss fight. "Other than it being an impressive fight scene, one reason that we made crashing down through floors of a building the final action of the game was due to the first video we saw of the movie," Ivan enthuses. "The video was a very rough early cut, in some cases, scenes had their live-action elements but no effects. The final battle scene came with explosions and holes appearing in the ceilings and floors as the view cut from one to the next, but no RoboCop characters falling through floors as they grappled on the way down."

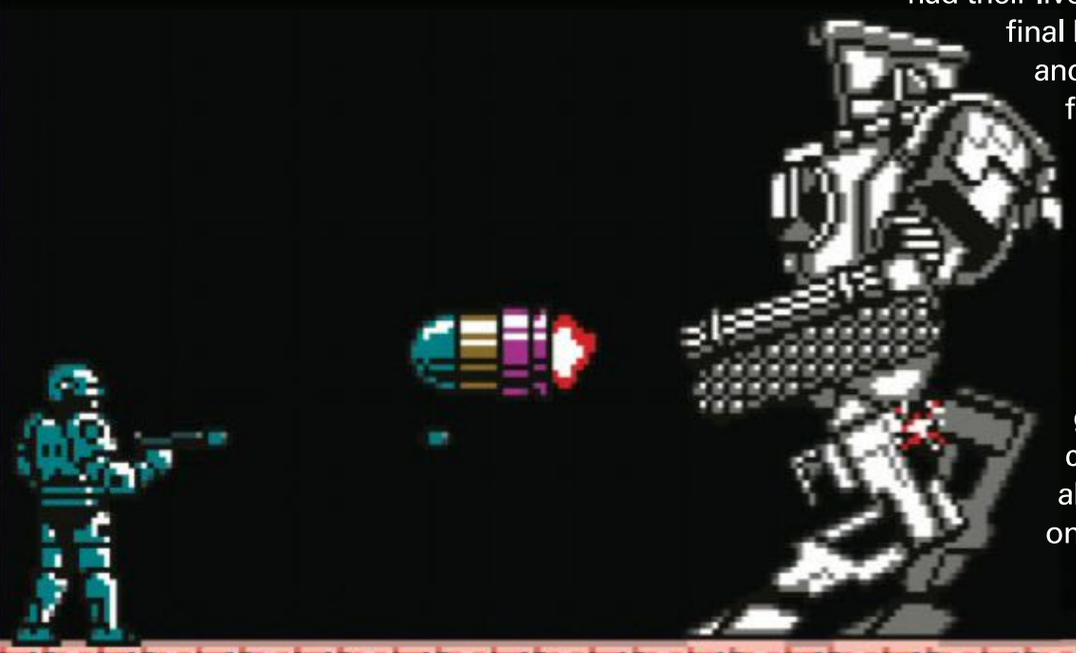
But in contrast to the gruesome conclusion of the *RoboCop 2* movie, Ivan opted to end his Spectrum adaptation with bullets rather than gore. "For us it was the natural choice; we didn't come up with alternatives to it. As far as the focusing on shooting rather than brain-crushing, that was probably to avoid something so graphic, but it was also that sticking to a gun-based resolution meant less work for us."

But more work was exactly what awaited Ivan and his codeveloper Andrew, as their next task was to adapt *RoboCop 2* for Amstrad's GX4000 console, which required an entirely fresh design based around platforming challenges. "It was unusual for us to make two versions so different," Ivan concedes, "so there must have been a strong reason for it. One possibility would have been a desire by Ocean to differentiate the Spectrum and GX4000 adaptations. I also remember that the NES version – which was done out-of-house – was heavily platform-based and a lot less gun action, and I think that might have been a factor in us doing the same for the GX4000."

The outsourced NES *RoboCop 2* also inspired Ivan to incorporate mechanics into his GX4000 adaptation that allowed its metal-clad hero to fly around levels.

"The NES version had hoverpads that operated in the same way as ours, so probably we got the idea for them after seeing that," Ivan reflects. "I remember the NES game being very well received by Gary Bracey, but whether it was a decision

» [ZX Spectrum] The need for a quick trigger finger is established seconds into the Spectrum *RoboCop 2*.



COMMODORE 64

SHOOTING RANGE

■ All three 8-bit takes on *RoboCop 2* have shooting ranges, but the C64 version gives you a second chance to advance if you miss your quotas in the previous level. This creates a real incentive to ace the C64 adaptation's gun range, which also plays better than either of its counterparts.

COMMODORE 64

ROOFTOP NINJAS

■ Although the C64 *RoboCop 2* has attractive visuals throughout, the night sky backdrop of its striking Centrum rooftop stage really sets it apart. Aesthetics aside, the level delivers challenging foes in the form of ninjas that attack with flying kicks, alongside reasonably hard platforming.

» [NES] The memory restoration stage in the NES *RoboCop 2* contains several on-rails hoverpad sections.

"We just wanted to break the game up with something different from the action. It helped to tie the game into the less action-based parts of both movies"

Ivan Horn

made by Andrew and I, or by Ocean management, it's too long ago to remember."

Further inspirations followed as Ivan reworked the external-to-internal location swapping from the Spectrum *RoboCop 2* into scrolling levels with static rooms behind their walls. "It's only vaguely familiar that we had these parts of the levels," Ivan points out. "However, I would say that they were most likely added to get the depth of two layers of gameplay without the cost of having two whole map layouts."

Then on the slightly underwhelming ending that was designed for the GX4000 *RoboCop* sequel, Ivan cites technical reasons precluding the Amstrad version adapting the ZX Spectrum iteration's more exciting finale. "Possibly the reason for this was the smaller memory of the GX4000, plus the higher memory cost of its coloured graphics," Ivan theorises. "I don't remember any specific reasons for the difference between the two, so something practical like that is most likely. But certainly the action in the Spectrum finale was more intense and varied."

Equally intense and varied was the C64 take on *RoboCop 2*, which was converted from the NES version, both of which were designed and coded by Mark Rogers after Ocean awarded his firm Painting By Numbers with the adaptations. "The primary platform was the NES, and so we generated something that was representative of the game early in development," Mark recollects. "We sent that off to Ocean, and we got approval to move forward. Only after did we discover that there was another team also working on *RoboCop 2* for the NES. Apparently, the two builds were pitched against each other, and then Ocean went with the one that it liked. Luckily it was us."

Having secured a deal with Ocean, Mark reviewed what little information he had been sent on the as-yet unfinished *RoboCop 2* movie with a view to adapting it for the Commodore 64 and NES. "We got materials from the film itself,

CONSOLE CAPERS

Ivan Horn and Mark Rogers on getting RoboCop 2 onto the GX4000 and C64GS

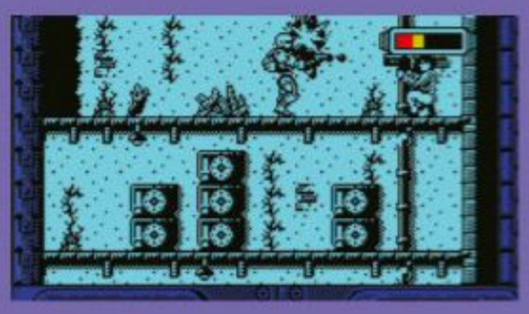
"I remember at the time that there was a lot of interest at Ocean in the new GX4000 console from a management point of view," former Ocean artist Ivan Horn says. "That was to the extent that while in its development, James Higgins – an Ocean coder – went to Amstrad at least once to talk to its GX4000 development team. Ocean was pretty tight-lipped about the sales of the games that we made, so I've got no real idea of how many copies it sold. But given that there were only about 15,000 units of the GX4000 console [sold], even if every owner bought *RoboCop 2* that would have been pretty disappointing sales for that platform."

On the C64GS *RoboCop 2*, former freelance Ocean coder Mark Rogers recollects a compatibility problem with the system's cartridges. "When Ocean created the cartridges it forgot about the C64C – the white plastic version of the C64. The ROM slot at the back of it had a notch in it, where as the original C64 didn't, and Ocean's cartridges didn't have a notch, so they wouldn't fit. So Ocean had to cut the notches manually. I remember going up to Ocean and seeing someone with a jig made of old pieces of wood and a saw creating these notches. I [did] some myself. So if anyone still has a cartridge they'll see a notch that was actually cut by hand!"

GX4000 and C64GS photos by permission of Evan Amos.

CONVERSION CAPERS

How the very different takes on RoboCop 2 compare



ZX SPECTRUM 128

■ The stages here are side-on affairs – the first is a gruelling shooter/platformer, the second involves tricky platforming and the third is a thrilling shooter. There are also puzzle and shooting gallery sections.

GX4000

■ This port is pretty much all platformer, with very few villains to shoot. Besides its main stage platforming, it has nicer looking versions of the Spectrum *RoboCop 2*'s puzzle and shooting range challenges.

COMMODORE 64

■ You get sent to a shooting range for recalibration if you miss your arrest and Nuke confiscation targets in this port. Otherwise, this adaptation alternates between shooting and platforming.

AMIGA

■ The Amiga *RoboCop 2* incorporates many of the best bits of the Spectrum and GX4000 versions, and it also has its own unique level designs, which are far bigger and have many more criminals.

ATARI ST

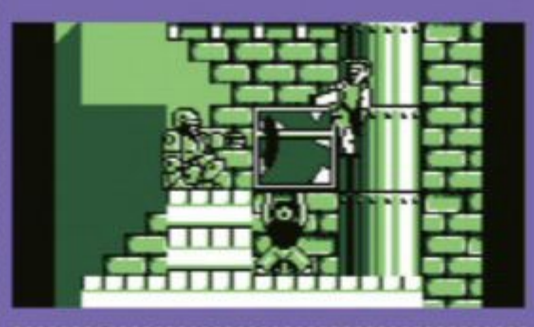
■ The ST *RoboCop 2* shares elements with the Spectrum and GX4000 iterations while boasting original level layouts. As with the Amiga adaptation, it has memory chip puzzles and shooting gallery stages.

NES

■ The NES *RoboCop 2* is largely identical to the C64 version. Where it differentiates itself is with its higher resolution graphics and in-game music, which the C64 *RoboCop 2* lacks.

GAME BOY

■ While it shares mechanics and areas with the C64 iteration, the handheld version has entirely different level designs. It also has more bosses, puzzles and jet pack shooter sections.



ARCADE

■ Data East's *RoboCop 2* coin-op is side-on, although it also has into-the-screen stages. Its core levels are frantic shooters where boss fights are plentiful, as are the over-the-top power-ups.

▶ but I don't think we ever saw any video of it," Mark recalls. "Back then, video was probably too much to deliver to us in the time required, so we got scripts, photos of the characters and the locations. From that, we pieced together a vision of what we thought the film would be like, so it was somewhat removed."

» Ivan Horn is currently the head of art at the Norwegian developer Ravn Studio.

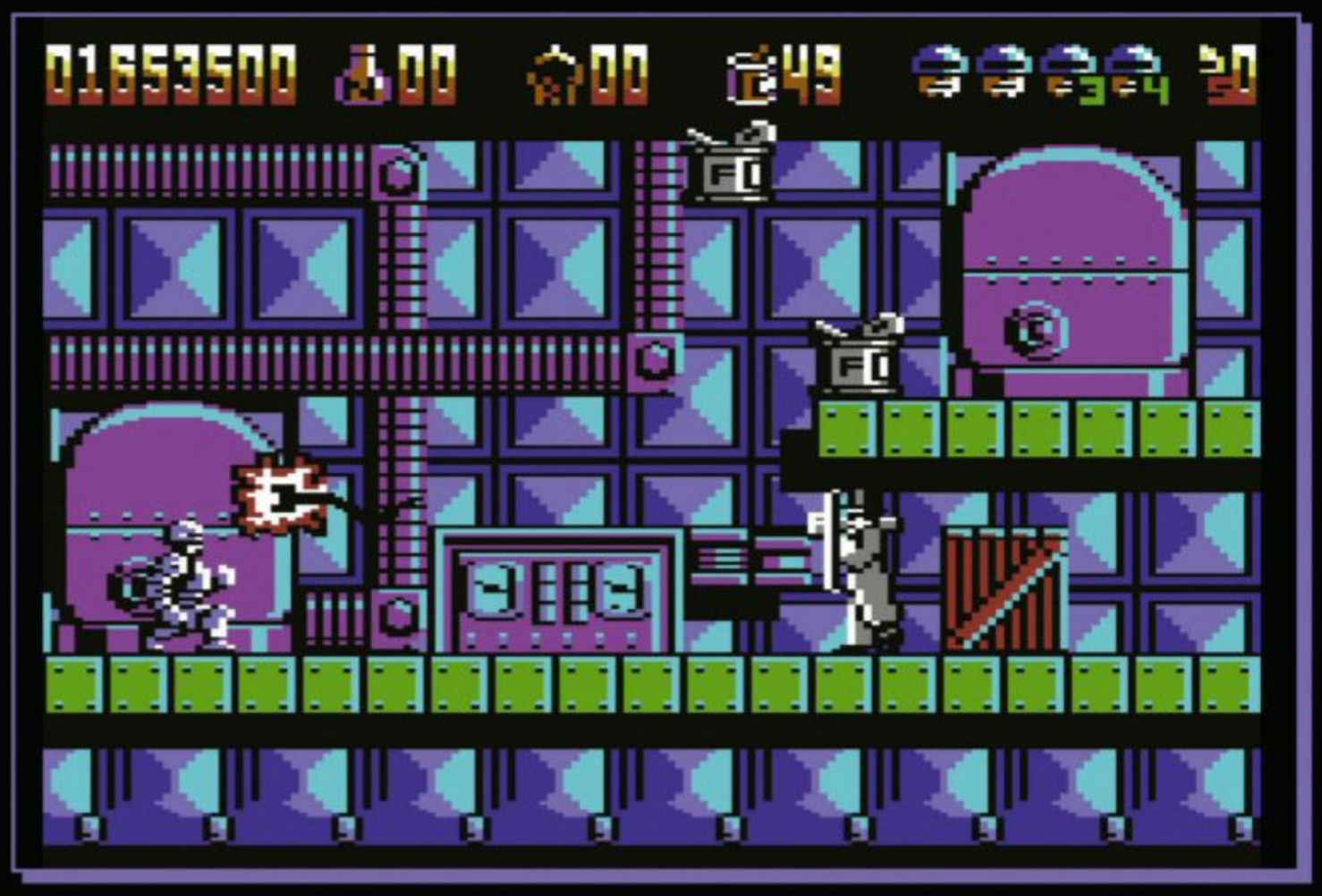
The gameplay specifics that emerged out of Mark's research combined shooter elements with platforming, which he feels struck a better balance than a single-genre design would have. "In order to maximise the gameplay over the screen it was nice if we could have *RoboCop* moving vertically within the screen space," Mark observes. "It allowed more possibilities, and if it had been a straight shooter you would have been shooting a *lot*. So the thought was that if we combined that with other forms of gameplay, such as platforming and other genres, then it would be more of a complete experience."

Like its Spectrum and GX4000 counterparts, Mark's *RoboCop 2* design incorporated indoor and outdoor locations, although the exteriors favoured shootouts over platforming and the interiors favoured platforming hazards over firefights. "With internal spaces you could justify more things like cogs and other industrial items that would allow you to add more gameplay in," Mark argues. "But you couldn't justify that so much in the exteriors. The interiors played into factories and those sorts of things, and so that was the delineation between the two."

Also in keeping with Ocean's GX4000 *RoboCop 2* was Mark's inclusion of hoverpads in his adaptations, which although not in the movie did greatly benefit the games. "I think the main reason we did the hoverpad was because it was cool!" Mark grins. "It just wasn't possible to do 3D or physics or anything else, but to the degree that we could do these things it was cool. So it was interesting for me to do; that's the reason the

» [C64] The hoverpads in the C64 version of *RoboCop 2* are used to navigate deadly side-scrolling mazes.

» [GX4000] The shooting gallery in the GX4000 *RoboCop 2* has larger targets than the Spectrum 128 version.



» [C64] *RoboCop 2*'s big bad – Cain – puts up a decent boss fight even before he becomes 'RoboCop 2'.

hoverpads are there. I also think that they played pretty well."

A third aspect of the Amstrad version was also mirrored in Mark's *RoboCop 2* design, in the shape of shooting range stages that would pop up between core levels. "The shooting gallery was purely down to the fact that I really liked shooting ranges – and *Duck Hunt*," Mark remembers. "It was also just to break up the gameplay and give the player something else to do. It was fun in its own right, and it got progressively more difficult. You could learn the tracks and routes of it. The gunsight had an analogue feel to it, and an acceleration and a deceleration, so that felt good."

The shooting range levels in Mark's games weren't mandatory, however, and only appeared if players failed to arrest an unspecified number of criminals and confiscate unspecified amounts of the fictitious drug Nuke in the core levels. "I can definitely understand why we made it a requirement that you should collect a certain amount of Nuke to tie back to the licence," Mark considers. "But I don't know why we didn't tell players how much Nuke to confiscate. I think we were thinking of it from *RoboCop*'s standpoint, so if he was going into a building he wouldn't actually know how much Nuke was there."

Perhaps because of the different expectations of the times, the glowing reviews of Mark's C64 and NES takes on *RoboCop 2* didn't mention their unspecified quotas, and focused instead on the adaptations' superlative gameplay. "We obviously looked at the coverage in the magazines, and everything else as far as the reviews went," Mark recollects. "We were really happy with those, and we were obviously happy because they had gotten released, but there wasn't so much resting on our laurels or anything like that, it was just onto the next game."

The Spectrum and GX4000 versions of *RoboCop 2* that Ivan Horn designed at Ocean were released alongside the C64 and NES adaptations, and although Ivan's sequels sold less than their predecessors the designer wasn't disappointed. "Any idea that we would have emulated the sales of the original game would have been insanity," Ivan observes. "A year and a half at number one, I don't think any game on any platform has come close since. As for reviews, especially of the Spectrum version, I think we could be pretty satisfied with them, as well as the public reception, with *RoboCop 2* winning the 1990 'Best Game Overall' with *Crash* readers in 1990."

Reviewing the ZX Spectrum take on *RoboCop 2* with hindsight, Ivan expresses fond memories of developing the sequel but voices reservations over its stiff challenge. "It was fun to work on, but from my perspective it was just another one of those formulaic Ocean 'crates-and-barrels' games," Ivan muses. "However, it seemed to have a lot better reception than that. There's not a lot I'd change, other than maybe making it a little more forgiving. Andrew Deakin seemed to be on a mission to make games that even the best of the testers would find hard to complete, and that fed into my map layouts to some extent."

On his GX4000 *RoboCop* follow-up, Ivan describes an almost complete overhaul that would have brought it far closer to his ZX Spectrum 128 adaptation. "The 16-colour chunky pixel Mode 0 art just looks so unappealing now," Ivan reckons. "Given the task again, I'd probably take a look at the higher res, four-colour Mode 2. Other than that, if the choice had been ours, I would have made the gameplay closer to that of the Spectrum version, with more action and less platforming. RoboCop just doesn't strike me as a natural jumper!"

Looking back at his C64 and NES versions of *RoboCop 2* after decades of creating games, Mark Rogers offers an alternative approach that he could have taken, but qualifies this by explaining just how much the sequels mean to him. "I would probably look at the emotional component of *RoboCop*, and try to translate more of the nature of the character into the game," Mark contemplates. "But my *RoboCop 2* games were certainly of their time, and they were the games I wanted to do. For me, they're wrapped up with a lot of pleasant memories, so I regard them very fondly, and they make me smile." *

"The [C64 RoboCop 2] shooting gallery was purely down to the fact that I really liked shooting ranges – and Duck Hunt"

Mark Rogers

After Burner

» **DEVELOPER:** Sega AM2 » **YEAR:** 1987

As a game designer, Yu Suzuki has always been preoccupied with creating simulations of some kind, from the motorbike control method of the *Hang-On* cabinet to the detailed world of *Shenmue* on the Dreamcast. With *Out Run* taking care of land-based vehicles and *Top Gun* drawing millions at the box office, AM2's next project to use Sega's cutting-edge sprite scaling technology was a flight combat game. Though critics might argue that the game is a tad shallow, *After Burner* was truly spectacular to behold, thanks to its blistering speed, massive explosions and full barrel rolls.

In keeping with AM2's previous showpiece games, *After Burner* was available in a deluxe motion cabinet. But not every operator had the money or space to host such an attraction, so this upright version was available instead. The game is controlled with the flight-style joystick, with the fire trigger inside and the missile button on top, as well as a lever to the left for controlling thrust. The grey moulding around the monitor is designed to evoke the look of the in-game fighter jet, and two lights on top glow red when a missile lock-on occurs, which serves to draw the attention of nearby players.

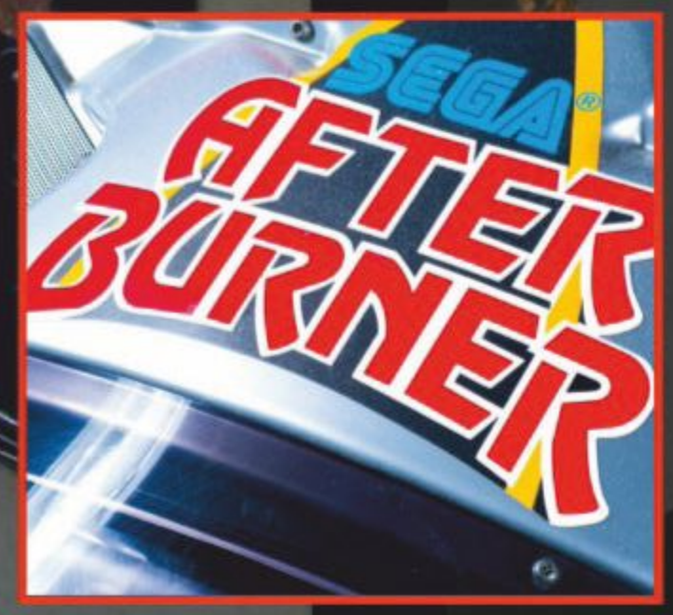
After Burner fact

■ Full 'melody' versions of *After Burner*'s tracks were composed, but never used in the arcade version. CDs and home conversions did include them, and the 3DS port of the game finally included full arcade versions.

STANDOUT MOMENT
Life In The Past Lane

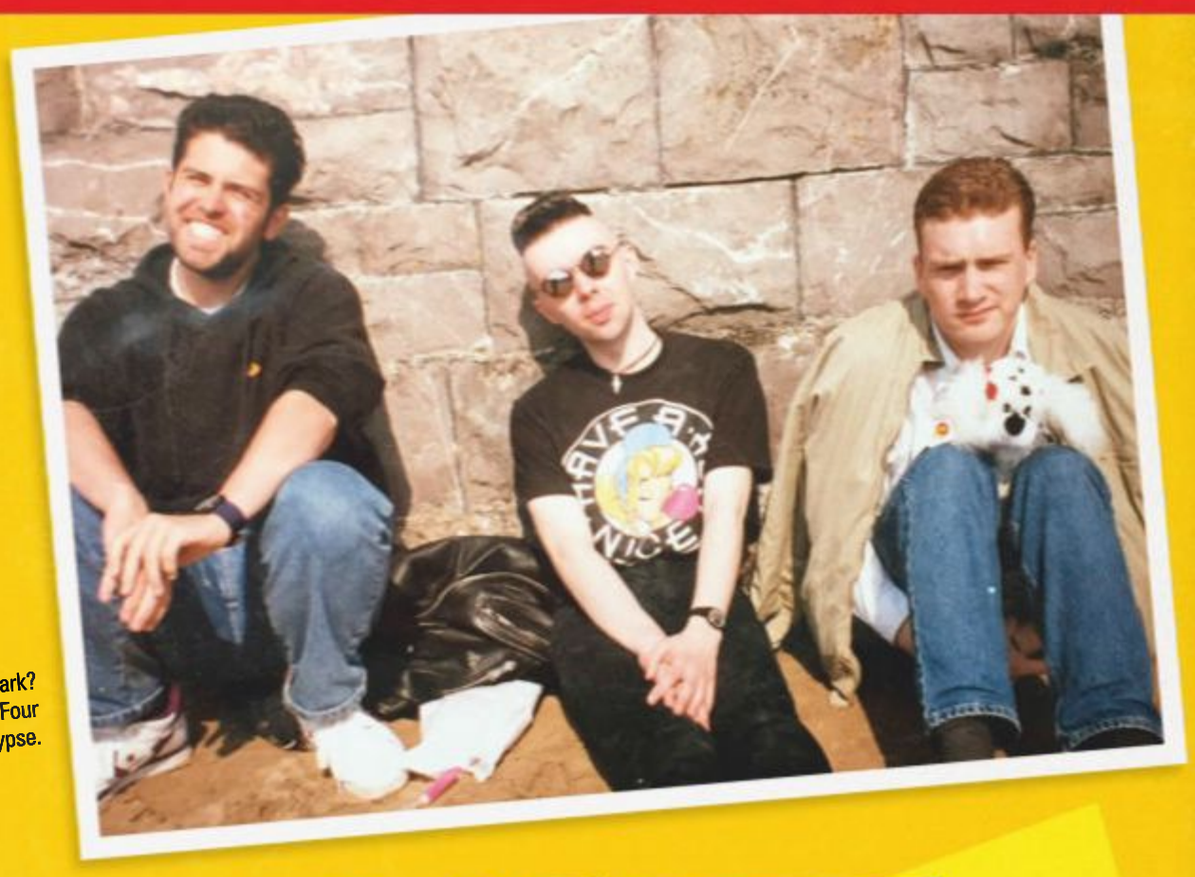
The **Retro Gamer** team is always keen on little nods to history, and the brief cutscene that takes place after a few stages has a good one. Your F-14 comes in to land on a road for some servicing. While this happens, the motorbike from *Hang-On* starts off down the road and overtakes the fighter jet, only for the jet to quickly speed past the rider as it takes off. Another version of this scene takes place later in the game, and replaces the bike with the car from *Out Run*. It's only a small presentation thing, but we love it.

HOMING MISSILE
When the enemy aircraft is sighted, the sight enlarges and the LOCK ON indicator lights. At this time, fire the HOMING MISSILE at the target.
CANNON
The CANNONS can be automatically fired one after another at the sighted object.
RADAR
When the RADAR screen indicates that the opponent's plane is right on your tail, the DANGER lamp will begin flashing. Use the THROTTLE LEVER to shake off the enemy fighter!
DANGER lamp
LOCK ON indicator
©SEGA 1987



SYSTEM SUPPLIED BY
ARCADE CLUB

» A picture of the AP office… but, you know, there are so many more things we could talk about in this article. Remember Canoe Squad?



» Or Sinister Theme Park? Not to mention The Four Cyclists of the Apocalypse.

alien-bashin' platform-rompin' puppy-lovin' game-reviewin' AMIGA POWER truth-tellin' disk-swappin' street-fightin' horizontally-scrollin' joystick-wagglin' best-sellin'

THE MAKING OF AMIGA POWER

In the beginning, there was Amiga Power. And lo, these mighty beings did DISSEMINATE ESSENTIAL INFORMATION. Here, they reveal the TRUTH of what happened behind the scenes at the much-loved, and much-missed, magazine

Words by Lewis Packwood

» Cam was the Cyclist at the back, by the way. He says he's still got the sledgehammer. [Are you actually going to write proper captions? – Ed]

» FINE. Here's a normal caption: A sketch by Jamie Hewlett of the character that was set to appear on every *AP* front cover. HAPPY?

» They nicked some backdrop cloth from the photo studio to make the cloaks.

My biggest disappointment," begins Matt Bielby, *Amiga Power*'s first editor, "was that we had a very different cover design at the start." Later *Amiga Power* staffers would gently mock the initial incarnation of the magazine, with its clean white look and word-spattered covers, referring to it as the 'Matt Bielby Golden Age'. But Matt reveals that he never wanted those dull cover designs.

Originally, he had called in Jamie Hewlett, the artist behind Tank Girl and Gorillaz, to draw the covers for every issue of *Amiga Power*. "He developed a character for us," says Matt. "She was a bit like Tank Girl but had green hair, and she had kind of blobby floating alien sidekicks [you can see a sketch at the top of this page]. And Jamie was going to draw them for every cover in the outfits of whatever the lead game was. So if it was *Sensible Soccer* they'd be in football outfits, and if it was a car racing game they'd be in racing outfits, and so on." The suits soon put a stop to all that, though.

> **"There was a section at the front where we said there's no point buying any other magazine"**
> Cam Winstanley

"Greg Ingham [*Amiga Power*'s publisher] hated it," continues Matt. "He saw it at the last minute and thought it was wrong for the magazine. And so we suddenly had to come up with another way of doing the covers, which is why we had these sort of *Q* magazine-influenced text and pictures." Generally, however, Matt recalls that the management was hands-off in its treatment of *Amiga Power*.

Jamie's green-haired character and her alien sidekicks resurfaced later in 1991, the year of *Amiga Power*'s launch, when they graced the covers of several EPs and an album by the British punk band Senseless Things. And Matt eventually did get to have his comic book-style magazine covers. He later became launch editor for another fondly remembered magazine, *Super Play*, and commissioned Wil Overton to draw anime-style art for every single front page.

SPREAD THEIR SEED

Despite his questionable taste in covers, Greg did at least contribute one of the lasting aspects of the magazine. "He said it should have a subtitle: 'A Magazine With Attitude'," remembers Matt. "I think he decided that was a good thing to kind of distinguish it from the more serious and slightly straight-faced magazines that Future Publishing had at the time. It helped define the magazine, but a lot of what we did over the next few years was working out what 'A Magazine With Attitude' meant." One of the things it meant, as it turned out, was subverting the subtitle 'A Magazine With Attitude', which variously appeared on the cover of later issues as 'Ein Magazin Mit Stellung' and 'The Magazine With No Future'. Whether by chance or design, *Amiga Power* became a roiling cauldron of wit and anarchy, a magazine that steadfastly refused to conform to the norms of Nineties games publishing.

And it had a devoted following. There was no better illustration of this than the letters ➤

Where are they now?

The staff's life, after Amiga Power

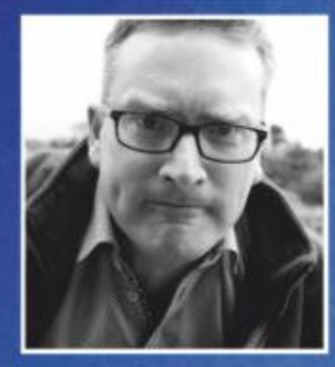
MATT BIELBY

■ After birthing *Amiga Power*, Matt says he'd "become one of the go-to guys to launch anything that was games-y", and Future offered him the chance to helm either a Mega Drive or a Super NES magazine. He picked the latter, launching *Super Play* in 1992. He went on to launch *PC Gamer*, *.net*, *SFX*, *Total Film*, *Arcade* and the *Official PlayStation 2 Magazine* before eventually leaving Future. Currently, he says he's "desperately trying to write some novels – they're not finished yet, but they're getting there" while running a food mag called *Crumbs*.

STUART CAMPBELL

■ Stuart left *AP* to work for Sensible Software during the production of *Cannon Fodder 2*, *Sensible World Of Soccer* and *Sensible Golf*. After that he did "all kinds of things in journalism and games development". He now edits the "world's biggest Scottish politics website, Wings Over Scotland, which advocates Scottish independence and gets around a quarter of a million readers every month from a country of 5 million people. Coincidentally that's around the same number as total sales of the Amiga 500, so I guess proportionally Wings is about five times as popular as *AP* was. All those other losers were clearly just holding me back".

JONATHAN DAVIES



■ After *AP*, Jonathan moved to *PC Gamer*, and later helped to launch *N64 Magazine*. He did a couple of years at the BBC on the *Top Gear* website, before launching Gamespress.com. Both Jonathan and Cam married an *Amiga Power* art assistant called Lisa. "But not the same one, if that makes sense," he says. "It was quite a while after *AP* that I got together with my Lisa (Nicholls). We stayed friends post-*AP*, and she used to water my plants when I was working down in London, and she did such a good job of it that it only seemed right to pop the question. We're now sharing a house with a couple of mini-mighty beings beneath an attic full of obsolete computers."

Where are they now?

...and here's the rest of them

RICH PELLEY

■ After Rich left Future Publishing he vowed never to play a videogame again (although he says he "DID PLAY *MARIO KART* ON THE WII AGAINST MY NEPHEW ONCE, AND HE BEAT ME"). He decided to become a men's magazine journalist. After writing for magazines like *FHM* and *Loaded*, Rich finally decided it was "ALL A BIT EMBARRASSING" and started working for *The Guardian* instead.

CAM WINSTANLEY

■ *Amiga Power* was the first (and only) games magazine that Cam worked on. In 2003, he married former *AP* art assistant Lisa Kellett after bumping into her at a party. Cam says that "like most freelance writers, I now sit in my spare room cranking out copy for B2B journals and internally-distributed magazines for European IT consultancy firms while writing screenplays in my spare time". His first (and only) novel, *B-spine*, is "languishing at 2,312 in the 'Cyberpunk sci-fi' category of the Amazon Kindle store".

» Remember that time when Rich drove a car into the sea?

» Or The AP Files, a 14-page feature on the paranormal that had exactly nothing to do with Amiga games?

» *Office Joust* was the best. That was when they worked out they could use a camcorder and a screen-grabbing machine to take their own photos without booking a photographer. [This is your final warning. – Ed]

FREE!
AMIGA POWER
100
GREAT GAMES
100 GREAT REVIEWS
Celebrate with us the best Amiga software in the world!
FREE! A COMPLETE GAME SNATCHED FROM THE ALL TIME TOP 100!

» ISSUE 0 WAS A 32-PAGE SAMPLER INCLUDED IN *AMIGA FORMAT*

» A SOFTWARE COMPANY EXECUTIVE APPEARS ON THE FRONT COVER. AP2 NOTES THAT "THE RESPONSIBLE PARTIES WERE TAKEN OUT AND QUIETLY MACHINE-GUNNED"

THE MATT BIELBY GOLDEN AGE

1991 **1992**

ISSUES 0-8 ISSUES 9-20

page, 'Do The Write Thing', in which regular correspondents became minor celebrities in their own right, and where in jokes were born and subsequently spread their seed through the entire magazine. Who can forget the saga of Bob The Hamster, for example, a gender-tripping epic that culminated in the line 'BYE-BYE BOB. YOU WERE A GIRL HAMSTER' being printed along the spine of issue 55 of *Amiga Power*?

One of the regular letter writers was C-MONSTER, the pseudonym of one Kieron Gillen, who later went on to write *The Wicked + The Divine* and the Marvel *Darth Vader* comics, among many others. "*Amiga Power*'s letter page was a wonder," he recalled in 2014. "People writing in recurring characters to proper full on rants to people who you loved to hate." And the loss of *Amiga Power* still stings. "We will never see its like again. At its best, it was as good as anything."

PUT A STAR NEXT TO IT

When asked what set *Amiga Power* apart from other gaming magazines at the time, *Amiga Power* writer Stuart Campbell responds with a single word: "TRUTH". The writers insisted on using the full percentage scale when scoring games, awarding average games a score around the 50% mark. This caused upset. "If a game is bad, you say it, you say their game is bad," recalls Cam Winstanley, long-time *Amiga Power* staffer and editor from issue 51 to 55. "And then the advertisers threaten to pull their advertising, and then you go 'pull your advertising', and then they pull their advertising, and then we wrote about how they pulled their advertising."

Indeed, *Amiga Power* went on a mission to call out what was rotten in the state of review mark. "There was a section at the front where we said there's no point buying any other magazine, here are the scores that the other magazines have given," says Cam. "We actually did a little grid every month, and we actually put a star next to it that said: 'appears as an exclusive, cover disk or a cover'. And it would be like '70%, 70%, 70%, 99%', and there would be a little star next to it.

"For all of this stuff about Gamergate that came up recently, you know, ethics in the games industry, I just found that hilarious, because going back, game reviews were just bought and sold. Absolutely without doubt, flat out, bought and sold. Not with money that I know of, but certainly with massive perks and freebies and nice trips. And because we didn't do that, we just didn't get any of that. So we kind of lost out on a lot of cool trips and T-shirts by actually writing reviews."

CULMINATING IN A CRACKING

Amiga Power's commitment to vigorous scoring resulted in a long-running feud with Team17, apparently caused by the developer taking issue with *Amiga Power* giving its games 'low' scores. "It was all a bit strange, and rather a shame," recalls Jonathan Davies, who was the magazine's editor from issue 37 to 50. "Team17 were one of the Amiga's greatest games publishers, but even they produced the occasional stinker, which *Amiga Power* wasn't afraid to call them out on. Plus, of course, *Amiga Power* scored games properly, rather than giving them 98% just because the PR guy was a mate or whatever."

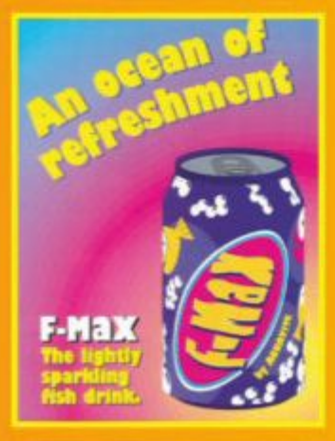
Cam notes that *Amiga Power* actually scored Team17 games fairly highly: "We once added up all the scores, and we worked out they had an average of 76% or something [Subsequent fact checking reveals it was 73%, coincidentally the 'number of the beast' – Ed], which is actually pretty good for

» RAINBOW ISLANDS COMES NUMBER ONE IN THE *AP* TOP 100

» *SENSIBLE SOCCER* COMES NUMBER ONE IN THE *AP* TOP 100

» THE *CANNON FODDER* POPPY COVER IS PULLED AFTER PRESSURE FROM THE BRITISH LEGION

» *GRAVITY POWER* IS GIVEN AWAY ON THE COVER DISK



» AN ADVERT FOR F-MAX, THE LIGHTLY SPARKLING FISH DRINK, RUNS ON THE BACK COVER FOR SEVERAL ISSUES

» *SENSIBLE WORLD OF SOCCER* HITS NUMBER ONE IN THE AP TOP 100

» THE ENTIRE *AP* STAFF IS KILLED UNDER MYSTERIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES

» STUART CAMPBELL GIVES *INTERNATIONAL RUGBY CHALLENGE* A SCORE OF 2%

» THE BUDGET REVIEW OF *RAINBOW ISLANDS* GIVES IT 96%, THE JOINT HIGHEST *AP* REVIEW SCORE ALONG WITH *SENSIBLE WORLD OF SOCCER* 95-96

» THE FIRST 'WHATEVER HAPPENED TO…?' FEATURE LOOKS AT *CYBERPUNK*

» *SENSIBLE SOCCER* RETAINS ITS PLACE AT NUMBER ONE IN THE AP TOP 100

THE MARK RAMSHAW ERA
THE LINDA BARKER ERA
THE STUART CAMPBELL ERA
THE JONATHAN DAVIES ERA
THE CAM WINSTANLEY ERA
THE COLLECTIVE ERA
THE TIM NORRIS ERA
THE STEVE FARAGHER ERA

1993 | 1994 | 1995 | 1996

ISSUES 21-32 | ISSUES 33-44 | ISSUES 45-56 | ISSUES 57-65

The Amiga Power timeline

The glorious eras of gaming's most rock'n'roll magazine

a magazine that rated an average game at 50%." But the falling out seemed to be sparked by *Amiga Power*'s review of *Alien Breed 2*. "We loved *Alien Breed* because it was a really tight game," says Cam, "and then *Alien Breed 2* wasn't, and got a bit of a kicking. In the first game, all of the maps looked like sets, they looked like places: there were corridors… whereas *Alien Breed 2* just had these nonsense mazes that were just entirely arbitrary. Everything about it was just stupid. It was bigger, but it just wasn't as good."

Cam says that things escalated from there: "There was this conviction that it was personal." Team17 eventually stopped all contact with *Amiga Power* and started including the names of *Amiga Power* staffers as dim-witted computer opponents. Still, Jonathan notes that for a while "it seemed like we'd patched things up, culminating in a cracking *Super Stardust* cover".

Unfortunately, the peace didn't last. "Then there was a succession of unfortunate happenings," Cam says. "For example, they accidentally sent us a buggy version of *Arcade Pool* to review, and we accordingly gave it a thumbs down in *Amiga Power*, which was a shame because when they sent the real version shortly afterwards it was excellent and fixed all our complaints. Then, we were seemingly alone in the world in finding *Worms* a bit tedious. (What were we supposed to do? Pretend we liked it?) It was all downhill from there on, really."

> **"We once added up all the scores, and we worked out they had an average of 76% or something"**
> Cam Winstanley

HARRY DEAN STANTON

Scoring controversy aside, *Amiga Power* is probably best remembered for its humour. Every inch of the magazine was crammed with absurdisms, from cryptic messages etched down the spine to running gags in the 'Next Month' section on the back cover. Memorably, the same picture of *Hired Guns* featured in this section for months on end as the review copy repeatedly failed to arrive. Then after it eventually did arrive, the picture still remained, with the editors claiming it was stuck and no one knew how to get it off. Even the 'flannel panel', the list of contributors to the magazine, was ripe for gentle sedition, with job titles doctored and names cheekily edited. In issue 50, for example, Jonathan Nash's job title was given as 'Harry Dean Stanton'.

Cam says one of *Amiga Power*'s big influences was *Viz*, which "everyone was reading in the office at the time". The other was a book by Mark Leyner called *Et Tu, Babe*. "It's the funniest book I've ever read, and I strongly recommend it," says Cam. "And if you're familiar with *Amiga Power* and you read it, you'd go, 'Ahh, okay now I see.' It came out in 1992, and we kind of stole a lot of the stuff from it: it's a book about megalomania, and it purports to be written by a megalomaniac, and he talks about his megalomaniac lifestyle. And it's ridiculous. A lot of the style choices that we made were because we were reading that at the time. And because it's a bit obscure, no one else got that we'd kind of stolen it. So there you go, big secret there."

But much of *AP*'s humour originated from the fact that, in Cam's words, "A lot of the time you just got to piss about." He mentions aspects of the job could've been better, "but it didn't matter

AMIGA POWER 1991 - 1996

» In The Style Of… was great, too.

» And the letters page! Llars Erik Johnsrod, Isabelle Rees, Reader Millington…

➤ because you were playing videogames for a living". And that sense of a group of people simply having the time of their lives while being very silly spilled over into the magazine, says Cam. "You piss about, you write about it, and then people find that funny and they send in letters and photos, and then you write about that. And you've got this silly little club going."

IDIOT PARKOUR GANG

Stuart recalls that there was brilliant chemistry between all of the *Amiga Power* writers. "I hit it off with Mark Ramshaw [*Amiga Power*'s second editor] very early, and the company in general had a really strong culture at the time. But *Amiga Power* had a little office to itself, and I think that fostered a team spirit that was a little tighter than most and felt special. Obviously there were ups and downs and tensions like you'd get on any team – at one point, for example, Mark and I had a fall-out that saw him trying to break down the front door of the house we both lived in, while I waited in the hallway with a massive kitchen knife to stab him if he succeeded – but they were short-lived."

And Stuart emphasises that each member of the team really cared about the magazine that they were making. "The best illustration, I think, is how we used to react when a new issue came back from the printers," he remembers. "As soon as we got the call from the post room we would literally race through the building like some sort of idiot parkour gang to get to them first – if you've ever played the chaotic four-player Amiga game *Base Jumpers* it was kinda like that – then bring them back and spend an hour sitting reading the finished magazine to each other and laughing at our own jokes like total wankers. We absolutely loved what we were doing and were ludicrously proud of what we'd made, and that's an intoxicating feeling."

Jonathan Davies has similar fond memories of the *Amiga Power* years. Among them, "Jonathan Nash's never-ending supply of satsumas, the *Gravity Force 2* duels, the Friday afternoon cinema trips (shh), Cam's scratch-built *Frontier 2* cover model, getting to enjoy all of the best Amiga

Essential issues

Editions of Amiga Power worth racing through the office for

ISSUE 21

SENSIBLE SOCCER WITH HILARIOUS CONSEQUENCES

■ *Amiga Power* cover disks often featured bespoke games, like *Sensible Soccer Meets Bulldog Blighty* in issue 21. "The ball would explode randomly, [it] was just a unique game because it only existed on that cover disk," says Cam. *Gravity Power* was another exclusive: "We paid them a few hundred quid and we said, 'Do us a version where it looks exactly the same, but we want these major changes: we want the gravity halved, and we want the inertia changed to this, and we want the shields changed to this.' We played it all the time."

ISSUE 32

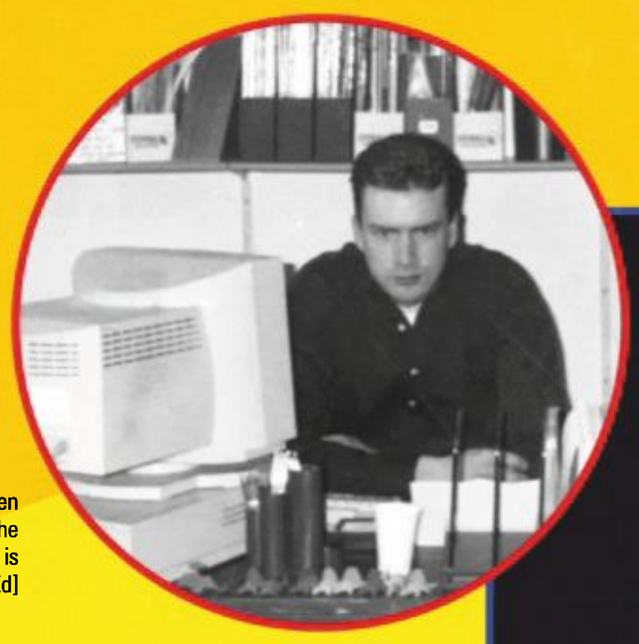
CANNON FODDER CONTROVERSY

■ The *Cannon Fodder* poppy cover was changed after *The Daily Star* saw it in an *Amiga Power* advert and ran a scathing article entitled '*Poppy Insult To Our War Dead*', while The British Legion threatened legal action. Stuart pointed out online in AP2 that the "knee-jerk reaction" was at odds with the game itself: "The facts here are that *Cannon Fodder* was [...] probably the most sensitive addressing of the issue of war ever seen. [...] It's in fact, ironically, the only game I can ever recall to treat its protagonists as anything other than cannon fodder."

ISSUE 48

THE HANDMADE COVER

■ The cover of issue 48 was a masterstroke of last-minute bodging, according to Cam: "We were locked into doing a *Frontier 2* cover on the understanding that there would be some artwork or some sort of preproduction things. But we got closer and closer to the issue, and we realised that it simply wasn't going to happen. So I stayed up three nights and bought, like, five model kits and some balsa wood and made a spaceship. And then we photographed it, then someone created a star field for it and put the laser beams in and stuff. [...] It was just some shit model that I'd made."



» Hey, what about that time when they did The Secret Garden in the style of Reservoir Dogs? [This is your final, FINAL warning! – Ed]

games, of course – like *Sensible Soccer* and *Guardian* – the good pals I made while working on it, the endless cups of tea… and generally just escaping with my life."

CHIPS AND GRAVY

Above all, though, *Amiga Power* was brilliantly written. As Matt says, "The magazine became a magnet for the kind of more inventive writers in the industry." This talent manifested in what the team called 'concept reviews', where they'd review a game in the style of a *Choose Your Own Adventure* story or a film script, to name two examples. Partly, says Cam, the concept reviews were an attempt to stave off boredom: "If you're writing six or seven game reviews per issue, you just kind of go, 'Urr, I just want to do something else now.'"

It wasn't all chips and gravy, though. Rich Pelley recalls that he was relegated to writing the tips page "BECAUSE NO ONE ELSE WANTED TO DO IT. AND I SECRETLY HATED IT". He was still at school when he began writing for *Amiga Power*. "I USED TO HAVE TO BUNK OFF SCHOOL ON A MONDAY MORNING AND GET TO BATH TO DELIVER MY COPY ON A FLOPPY DISK, AND THEN GET BACK TO SCHOOL BEFORE ANYONE NOTICED THAT I WAS GONE."

Rich did occasionally work in the office though, which is the origin of why he was always quoted in upper case. "THEY THOUGHT I SHOUTED ON THE PHONE. SO THAT'S WHY EVERY TIME I SAID ANYTHING IN THE MAGAZINE IT WAS IN CAPITAL LETTERS. OTHER PEOPLE THROUGHOUT MY CAREER HAVE SAID THE SAME THING."

» And F-Max, the lightly sparkling fish drink! [Right, you're fired! – Ed]

Along with the tips page, says Cam, the reader adverts were the other part of the magazine that the *Amiga Power* staff hated to work on – and The Secret Garden was actually an elaborate plot to try to get the page dropped by the management. "They had this thing where if you didn't spend your budget, they'd cut it. So the reason for doing The Secret Garden was that it was the single most expensive way we could do reader ads, because every three or four months we'd have to do an elaborately staged photoshoot. That's why it got out of control, because we were always trying to hire costumes just to spend the budget so that they'd complain about it, and they'd say we'd never have to do the reader ads page any more. But it never worked, and we just ended up doing silly photoshoots." The Secret Garden became ever more elaborate as the issues rolled by, to the point where Cam once stayed up all night making dinosaur models for a prehistoric diorama.

Ultimately, though, as the Amiga games ultimately dried up, the silliness had to end. *Amiga Power* went out with a triumphant, yet poignant, final issue – and when it was done, the staffers held a Viking funeral, setting a copy of the magazine alight and sailing it off down the River Avon. Then they went to the pub. All except Rich, that is. "I HAD TO GO HOME EARLY BECAUSE MY MUM WOULDN'T LET ME STAY OUT."

"We absolutely loved what we were doing and were ludicrously proud of what we'd made"
Stuart Campbell

ISSUE 52
DOOM, BUT IN REAL LIFE

■ Cam has fond memories of running around Future's corridors with BB guns for issue 52 of *Amiga Power*: "*Doom* in real life was totally my idea, and it was the most ripped-off feature I have ever seen," he remembers. "We were really put out, because every other games magazine also did it, but we were just going, 'Well we did it first.' Bath is absolutely covered with subterranean passages, so we did this amazing photoshoot in these passages under the Georgian buildings, where we had someone dressed up with BB guns. We also did the photoshoot with the guy with the enormous minigun."

ISSUE 55
THE JFK SPECIAL

■ By issue 55, the features were getting sillier and sillier. "You just reached a point where there weren't any games coming out," says Cam. "So then what happened was that all of the crazy things that had just been smaller aspects of the magazine suddenly became quite big, because you just had quite a lot of pages to fill. We did a thing about the Kennedy assassination, because conspiracy theories were big at the time, and we were just like, 'We've got ten or 12 pages, and we've got no content, let's just do something about the Kennedy assassination.' And so we did it as *Amiga Power* as we could."

ISSUE 65
THE END

■ Stuart on the final issue: "Well, closure was pretty inevitable at that point – there weren't any Amiga games any more. But it was an enormous privilege, granted to very few magazines, to get enough warning of it to do a proper goodbye issue, and I think the last *AP* is a very fitting tribute and a pretty great microcosm of everything the mag had been over the previous five-and-a-half years, all tied up in a brilliant underlying narrative. Steve [Faragher] and Sue [Huntley] did a terrific job of holding *AP*'s hand on the Green Mile, and the final page with the team and the Four Cyclists is so perfect it brings a wee tear to my eye even now."

Street Fighter II: The World Warrior

APPRECIATING GIRL POWER

» SNES » 1992 » CAPCOM

When I was growing up, *Street Fighter II* was a game that I would only get to play on special occasions – during trips to seaside arcades, or when I visited SNES-owning relatives – so my time with the game was always limited. Without time to try all the fighters I'd always just pick Ryu, since he wore a white gi like I did at karate, and therefore looked like a proper martial artist.

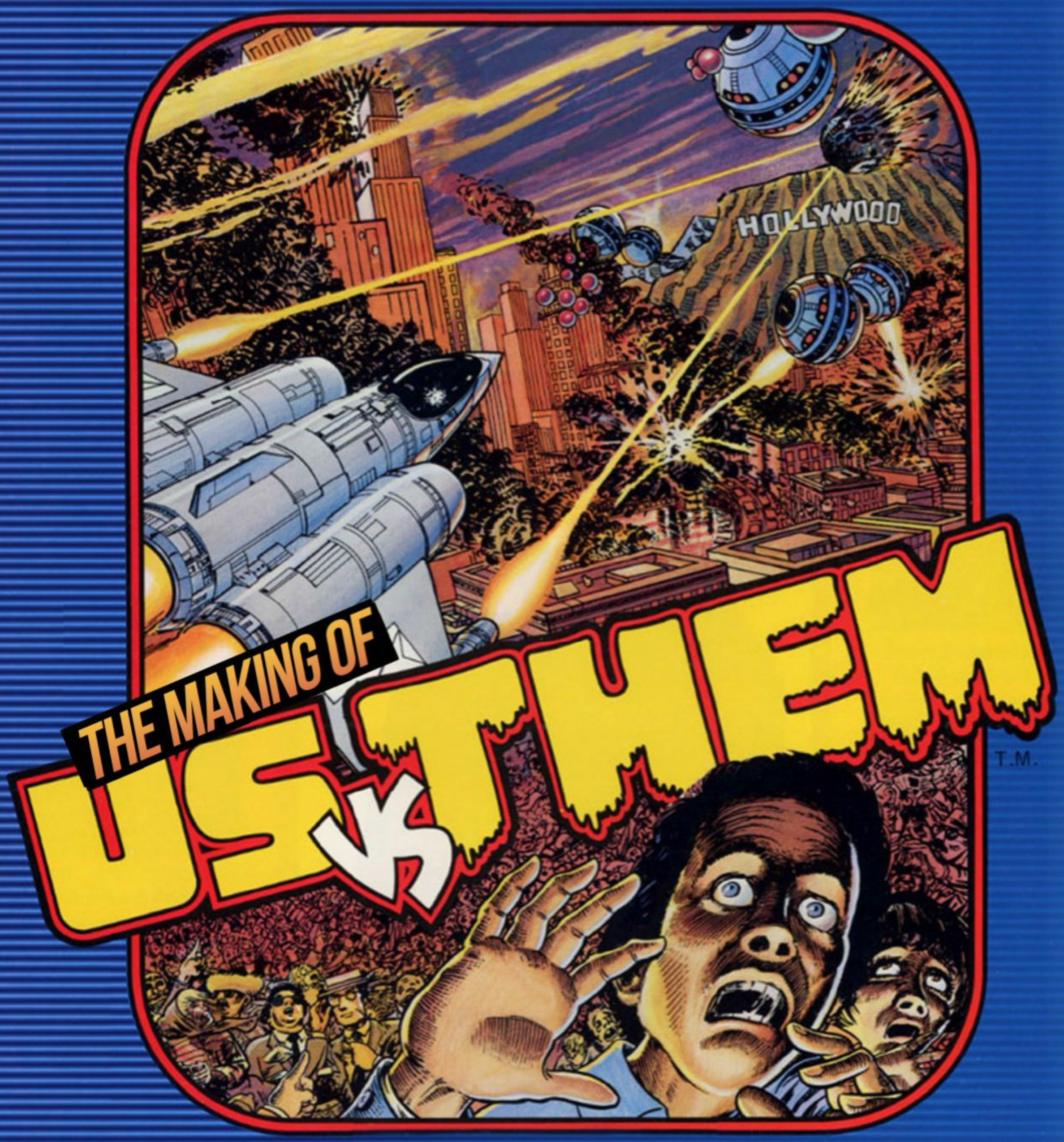
I never really began to appreciate the rest of the cast until I finally got to play against my cousin, who actually had two controllers. Being a bit older than me and the owner of the console, my cousin was able to wreck me swiftly and decisively, over and over again. After a little while, I began to get frustrated and started branching out into picking other characters. I finally thought I had my chance to win when I picked Blanka and my cousin chose Chun-Li. After all, I had a muscle-bound monster with green skin and sharp teeth, and he'd picked *a girl*. Surely she was just there for when your little sister wanted to play?

If you're thinking that my past self sounds like an idiot, you're completely right. But I wasn't even ten years old at the time, and at that point in my life, female characters in games just needed rescuing – and if they fought they were villains who needed weapons, like the whip-wielding enemies in *Double Dragon* and *Streets Of Rage*. They certainly weren't the heroes. But my cousin quickly dispelled that notion in my mind, as his capable guidance allowed Chun-Li to completely dismantle poor old Blanka with her superior mobility and lightning-fast kicks. She didn't even need the projectile attack she would get in later versions of *Street Fighter II*. I left my aunt's house humbled – and with a considerably more enlightened attitude towards women.

50000
START
BLANKA

FUTURISTIC LASER-BASED TECHNOLOGY? A SCI-FI FILM YOU COULD PLAY? IT SOUNDED IRRESISTIBLE TO WARREN DAVIS, WHO TELLS US ALL ABOUT WHAT HE DID AFTER Q*BERT

Words by Paul Drury



Warren Davis sighs deeply. "Oh man, I was crushed," he says, shaking his head. "I loved *Us Vs Them* so much and was so proud of it. When you create something like this, you do it for one reason – so people can play it. Then I heard about the LaserDisc problems, the backlash, the lawsuit… it was like my world was collapsing. It was a huge regret that more people didn't get to play the game."

At **Retro Gamer** we like to share the stories behind the titles that defined our childhood, but sometimes the tales of what could have been are just as fascinating. For a brief moment in the early Eighties, LaserDisc games seemed to be the future of coin-ops, combining movie-quality graphics with the interactivity of a videogame. Cinematronics led the way with *Dragon's Lair* and Sega, Atari and Stern all began developing their own titles utilising this cutting-edge technology. Gottlieb, renamed Mylstar after a company buyout in 1983, had enjoyed considerable success with *MACH 3* that year, which had you piloting a fighter plane over enemy terrain. It was a visually impressive, if slightly repetitive, shooter and certainly didn't embrace the storytelling potential of having access to real film footage, so when designer Dennis Nordman approached Warren with the idea of developing a science fiction B-movie themed LaserDisc game, he immediately jumped on board.

"I was extraordinarily excited to be working with movie-quality graphics on this new technology," Warren grins. "That was where I wanted the entire industry to go! But I was most excited about the chance to tell a story here, that somehow we could incorporate a script with real actors and scenes into this game experience. I honestly didn't know if it would work but that was the challenge."

The initial brief was to create a conversion kit for the many *MACH 3* machines that were already in arcades, which meant this new game, already dubbed *Us Vs Them*, had to work with the existing flight controls of that cabinet. The game was also restricted to 30 minutes of movie footage by the storage capacity of the disc, so Warren and the development team were very aware that any minutes devoted to, say, the attract mode or cutscenes, would mean less available for the playable levels. "It was always a juggling act," he admits. "I originally had the idea that every time you played it, you'd have different scenery, but then we realised we'd need so much flying footage, that would limit the number of levels. I also had this problem

» [Arcade] The final version of *US Vs Them* utilises three distinct viewpoints, all with furious shooting sections in them.

> **"I WAS EXTRAORDINARILY EXCITED TO BE WORKING WITH MOVIE-QUALITY GRAPHICS ON THIS NEW TECHNOLOGY"**
> Warren Davies

with *Dragon's Lair*, that you were mainly watching a movie and occasionally pushing the joystick. I wanted something far more interactive."

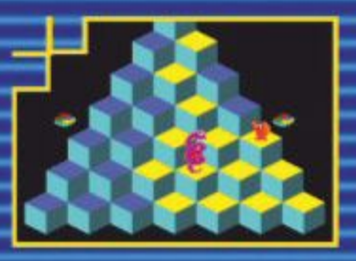
Warren opted for breaking up the narrative, a classic tale of a brave bunch of fighter pilots led by a maverick commander saving earth from alien invasion, into ten second snippets, followed by a minute of traditional arcade blasting. To inject some variety into the action, the 13 levels of the final game alternated between three different viewpoints: a behind-the-plane perspective as in *MACH 3*, a birds-eye view which added a rear gunner to your jet and some *R-Type*-style horizontal scrolling sections. Further additions included a *Return Of The Jedi*-inspired forest scene, which had you dodging trees as well as dispatching foes, and some marvellously odd 'Buck Rogers plays Hole In The Wall' mothership levels, requiring you to guide your craft through increasingly tricky gaps in a force field. ▶

» [Arcade] The FMV backdrops ensured Warren's game stood apart from traditional looking shoot-'em-ups.

"This is the Learjet we hired, and the guys from Clay Lacy flew the plane and operated the cameras," says Warren. "We had to tell them where we wanted the horizon, so we could have either a first-person shot or a birds-eye view. We'd get them to fly as straight as possible for five minutes because we knew we'd have to speed up the film so it looked like you were flying faster, and that would give us one minute of game footage!"

IN THE KNOW

» PUBLISHER: Gottlieb/Mylstar
» DEVELOPER: Mylstar
» RELEASED: 1984
» PLATFORM: Arcade
» GENRE: Shoot-'em-up



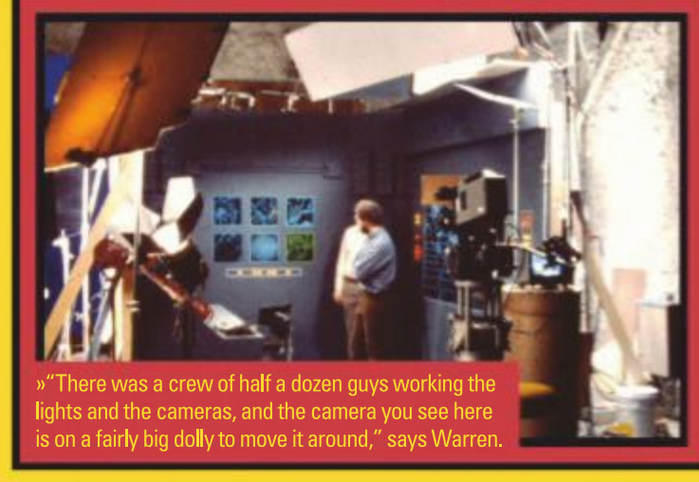
DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

Q*BERT (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1982

EXTERMINATOR
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1989

REVOLUTION X
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1994

» [Arcade] It's easy to laugh at the cheap-looking sets now, but this was cutting-edge stuff back in the early Eighties. It's hard not to love cheesy looking FMV.



»"There was a crew of half a dozen guys working the lights and the cameras, and the camera you see here is on a fairly big dolly to move it around," says Warren.

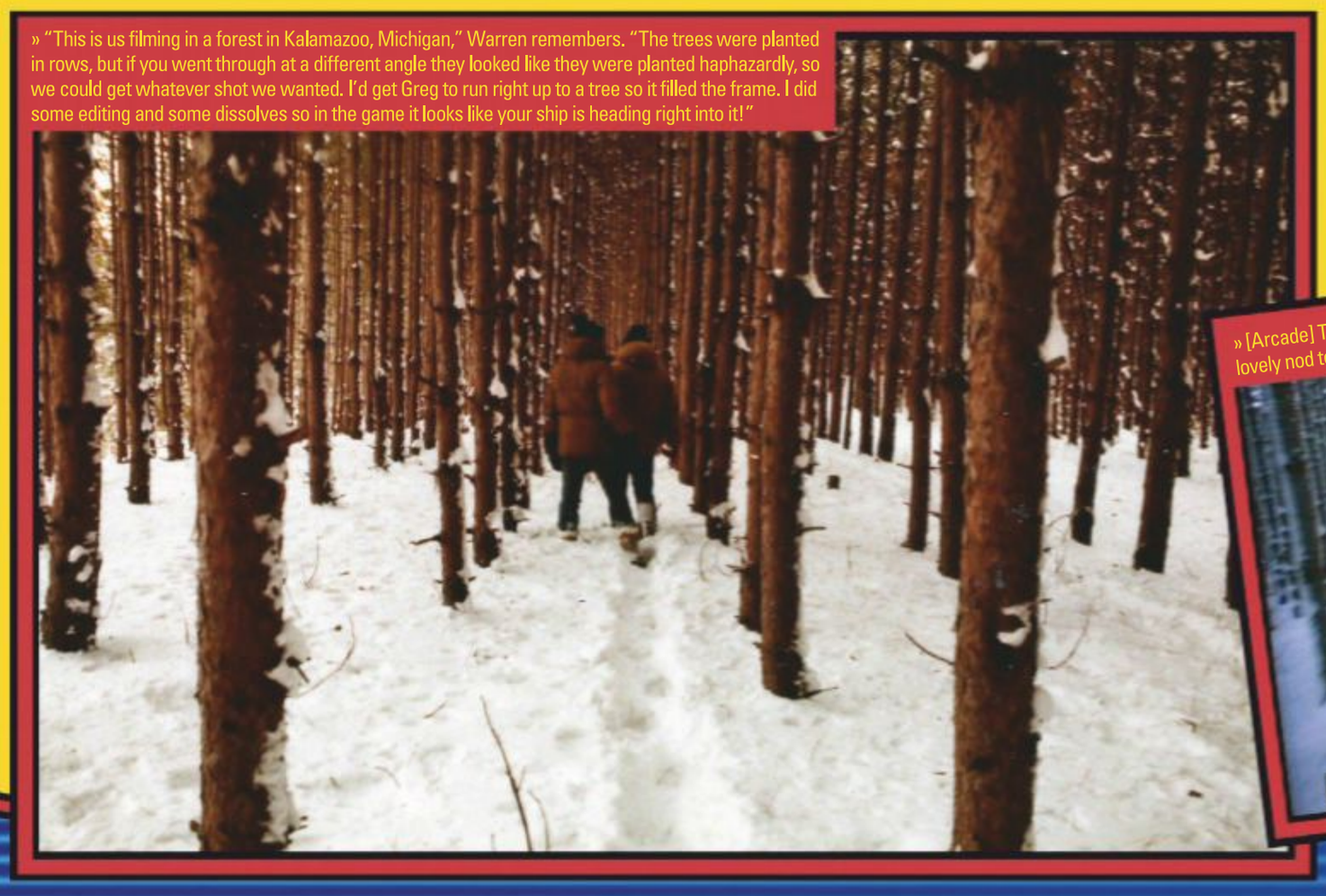
» "This is the 'Control Room' set," explains Warren. "Gottlieb's art director Rich Tracy got a little production company in Chicago to build it, and I waltzed in and was like, 'Wow! Even the costumes are perfect.' The guy looking directly at the camera is Gregory Franklin and he maintained an acting career for many years. The woman on the far left is Kate Buckley, who went on to have quite an illustrious career in the Chicago theatre scene."

"We'd made it so you shot from the edge of your wings so you had this dual line of bullets, which can kind of orient you as they converge in the distance," explains Warren, "and we added the ability to roll your plane to the right and left. Once we'd done that, it was like, 'How can we use this cool thing for more than just shooting? Wow, what if you were flying into something and you have to rotate your ship to a certain orientation?'"

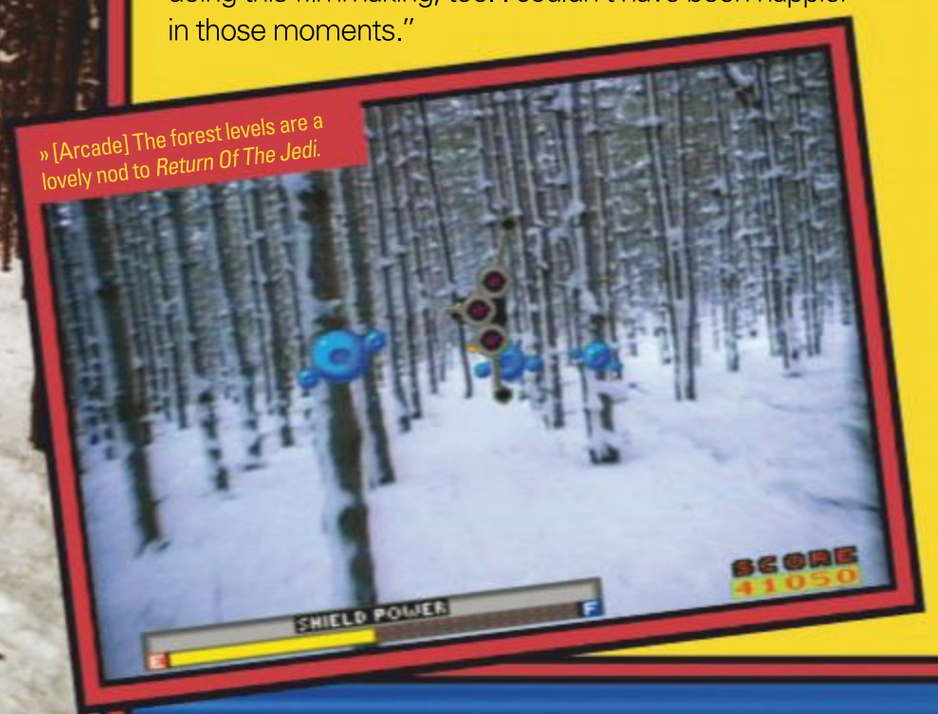
Even without the cinematic backdrops and live-action interludes, *Us Vs Them* would have been a solid shoot-'em-up with some interesting innovations, but it was the creative and ambitious use of the LaserDisc technology that really set it apart from its contemporaries. The decision was made not to use stock footage but to fly over distinctive American landscapes and gather original film for use in-game, so, in the summer of 1983, Warren and Dennis arrived at Hollywood's Burbank Airport and boarded a Learjet crammed full of film equipment. "There were about eight of us squeezed into this little plane and we headed off to Lake Powell in Arizona," Warren recalls. "The pilot kept making these crazy turns and with all the G-force, I was overcome with nausea. We kept stopping in these tiny airstrips in the middle of nowhere to refuel so I knocked back some Dramamine and it put me in this semi-sleep state. My memories of that trip have this strange haze to them."

Further jaunts included a snowy shoot in a forest in Michigan and a helicopter ride over Gottlieb's home town of Chicago, which was also the location of the 'Control Room' set, where the main story elements of the game were to be filmed. Auditions were held for key roles, such as the president of the United States, the duplicitous general and the hero of the story, captain Tracy, the latter part taken by one of Warren's friends from acting class, John Hadlestadt. "We wanted a certain believability from the leads," says Warren. "We wanted them to play it straight, like Leslie Nielsen in *Airplane!*. We knew it was gonna be kind of cheesy because it was low-budget and we didn't know what we were doing but we really wanted them to believe what they were saying."

The cast did an admirable job, delivering the knowingly cliched dialogue with gusto, particularly the villainous general, who brings an almost Shakespearean gravitas to the part, gnashing his teeth with such vigour you can sense the fear in the scenery. Warren even sneaked in a faceless cameo as helmeted pilot Mean Green and revelled in his role as ad hoc director, constantly suggesting different camera angles and urging the actors to 'do it again with feeling'. "This was the best of both worlds," he smiles. "I was making videogames, which was unbelievable, and now I was doing this filmmaking, too. I couldn't have been happier in those moments."



» "This is us filming in a forest in Kalamazoo, Michigan," Warren remembers. "The trees were planted in rows, but if you went through at a different angle they looked like they were planted haphazardly, so we could get whatever shot we wanted. I'd get Greg to run right up to a tree so it filled the frame. I did some editing and some dissolves so in the game it looks like your ship is heading right into it!"



» [Arcade] The forest levels are a lovely nod to *Return Of The Jedi*.

MINOR LAZER

Five other obscure LaserDisc games

ASTRON BELT 1983

■ This Sega-produced shooter is generally recognised as the first commercially released LaserDisc game, though various technical issues meant it didn't reach the United States until after *Dragon's Lair*, which largely stole its thunder, both over there and in Europe.

CLIFF HANGER 1983

■ Stern got into the laser game with this entertaining entry, which used footage from Japanese manga hit *Lupin The Third*, and offers much car-hopping, helicopter-dangling and breathless scuba-diving sections in your mission to rescue the beautiful Clarisse d'Cagliostro.

SUPER DON QUIX-OTE 1984

■ Featuring a mummy, dragon and electric jellyfish, none of which appear in Cervantes' 17th century proto-novel, this Universal title does at least include windmills, plus handy icons indicating which direction our brave knight should venture.

COBRA COMMAND 1984

■ Not to be confused with 1988's scrolling shooter of the same name, this Data East title has you piloting a helicopter and blasting seven shades out of your adversaries over seven levels en route to the enemy base, with a machine gun and missiles at your disposal.

ATTACK OF THE ZOLGEAR 1994

■ Proving LaserDisc games didn't die in the Eighties, this Namco-produced sequel to *Galaxian 3* used two disc players housed in a huge cabinet to display the outer space setting, with overlaid computer generated graphics in the mould of *Us Vs Them*.

© KLOV.com

» Warren proudly standing next to an original *Us Vs Them* cabinet at Funspot Arcade.

> **"THEY SAID THEY WEREN'T TAKING IT TO THE SHOW BECAUSE THEY DIDN'T WANT TO RISK IT NOT BEING READY. I TRIED TO CONVINCE HIM IT WOULD BE, BUT IT WAS A DONE DEAL."**
>
> Warren Davis

The enormous task of bringing together these two elements meant in the months leading up to the February 1984 Amusement Operators Expo, a key date for showcasing new titles to potential buyers, Warren virtually lived at the office. He coded in the day, edited the film footage in the evening and was confident he could have a fully playable cut-down version of the game, featuring the first handful of levels, ready for the show. Yet a few days before the big day, he received a visit from his boss Frank Ballouz, with some devastating news. "He said they weren't taking it to the show because they didn't want to risk it not being ready," says Warren. "I tried to convince him it would be, but it was a done deal. I was crushed. I'd been busting my ass."

Though it missed this important industry showcase, work continued and a month later, the game was ready to go out on field test. Initial reports from arcades were hugely encouraging with the game topping the takings in several locations, so the decision was made to produce dedicated *Us Vs Them* cabinets as well as conversion kits. Warren felt sure he had another hit on his hands… and then the now-infamous backlash against LaserDisc games struck. The machines simply couldn't cope with the kind of rough treatment coin-ops were subjected to in the real world. If a player banged a cabinet in frustration, it could cause the disc to skip and the game to crash, leading to angry punters demanding their money back and exasperated arcade operators thinking the technology was more trouble than it was worth. Orders were cancelled, lawsuits were filed and *Us Vs Them* was lost in the resulting fallout. Less than a thousand cabs were manufactured and the game has been largely forgotten, yet it retains a special place in Warren's heart.

"I'm very fond of *Q*Bert* and how it was received, but it was my first game and I was making it up as I went along," he says. "For *Us Vs Them*, I had some experience under my belt and had a vision for the game. There was the satisfaction of bringing in film-making, editing and storytelling skills. The game means a lot to me, it's probably the one I'm most proud of out of all my videogame work and I'm so grateful you're doing this piece and keeping it alive."

Thanks to Warren Davis for use of his personal photos. Look out for his memoir chronicling his long and illustrious career in the videogame business due out later this year.

» [Arcade] The game features witty mid-level interludes, like this skit of Grant Wood's famous *American Gothic* painting.

» [Arcade] Swooping over America's heartland with an alien bogey on your tail.

» [Arcade] The alien mothership must be destroyed to see off the invaders.

ULTIMATE GUIDE: CONTRA III THE ALIEN WARS

THE CONTRA SERIES HAD ALWAYS OFFERED A FUN WAY TO CAUSE SOME CARNAGE, BUT THE ARRIVAL OF NINTENDO'S SUPER-POWERED 16-BIT SNES ENABLED KONAMI TO TAKE IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL. WE LOOK BACK AT ONE OF GAMING'S GREATEST RUN-AND-GUNS

Words by Nick Thorpe

» [SNES] The recognisable Earth environments are dropped in the final stage, as you take out the aliens on their home turf.

We all know that it's possible to extract amazing performance from a dated gaming platform – with clever programming and perhaps a little hardware help, minor miracles are possible. But sometimes you just have to accept that more power *is* the answer, as a new hardware platform can bring wholly new possibilities to a game or genre, whether that's with new graphical techniques or through sheer computational power. When *Contra III: The Alien Wars* hit the SNES in 1992, there was no doubt that this was one of those instances, as the game featured impressive setpieces and high-intensity action that just wouldn't have been possible on older machines.

Contra was converted to a variety of platforms following its arcade debut and found success on the NES, but Nintendo's 8-bit platform wasn't especially well suited to the game's action. Konami's coders had to work to minimise sprite flickering in both *Contra* and *Super C*, and slowdown ultimately blighted *Contra Force*. But with the greater power of the SNES, *Contra III* was able to increase the carnage. Sprites stayed intact as bullets flew around the screen and enemies swarmed the stage, and the pace remained pretty consistent, save for during crazy special effects such as the transparent bomb blasts. Part of that is down to improved hardware, but it's important to note the stellar work done by programmers Mitsuru Yaida and Hideyuki Suginami in making efficient use of the SNES CPU. Their skills enabled the sorts of arcing flames and crazy multi-sprite bosses that made *Contra III* look more like an arcade game than anything else.

Importantly, none of the signature features of previous games were sacrificed in order to achieve

AWESOME ARSENAL

You'll need some help to beat back the alien hoards, and these weapons and power-ups prove to be just what you need

SPREAD GUN

The classic is back, and we'll always welcome it. Why limit yourself to a single line of destructive fire when you can spread the damage over a wider area?

HOMING GUN

Accurate aiming is for chumps and suckers, as anyone who has spent some time with these homing missiles will tell you. It's great for novice players.

BARRIER

This handy multihued shield allows you to run around at leisure, unimpeded by enemy gunfire. It turns red when it's on the verge of expiring, so pay attention!

CRUSH GUN

This weapon fires powerful blasts that leave lingering explosions, causing extra damage. The major disadvantage is the short range of fire.

LASER GUN

While this weapon only fires in a straight line, much like the standard machine gun, it's extremely powerful and makes short work of tough bosses.

FLAMETHROWER

The flamethrower suffers from a limited range, but it destroys some enemy projectiles and whips around as you turn, covering angles other weapons don't.

BOMB

You start each life with one of these, but picking up more gives you extra opportunities to clear up a screen full of enemies at the touch of a button.

MAN-FACED MUTT

HELLRIDER

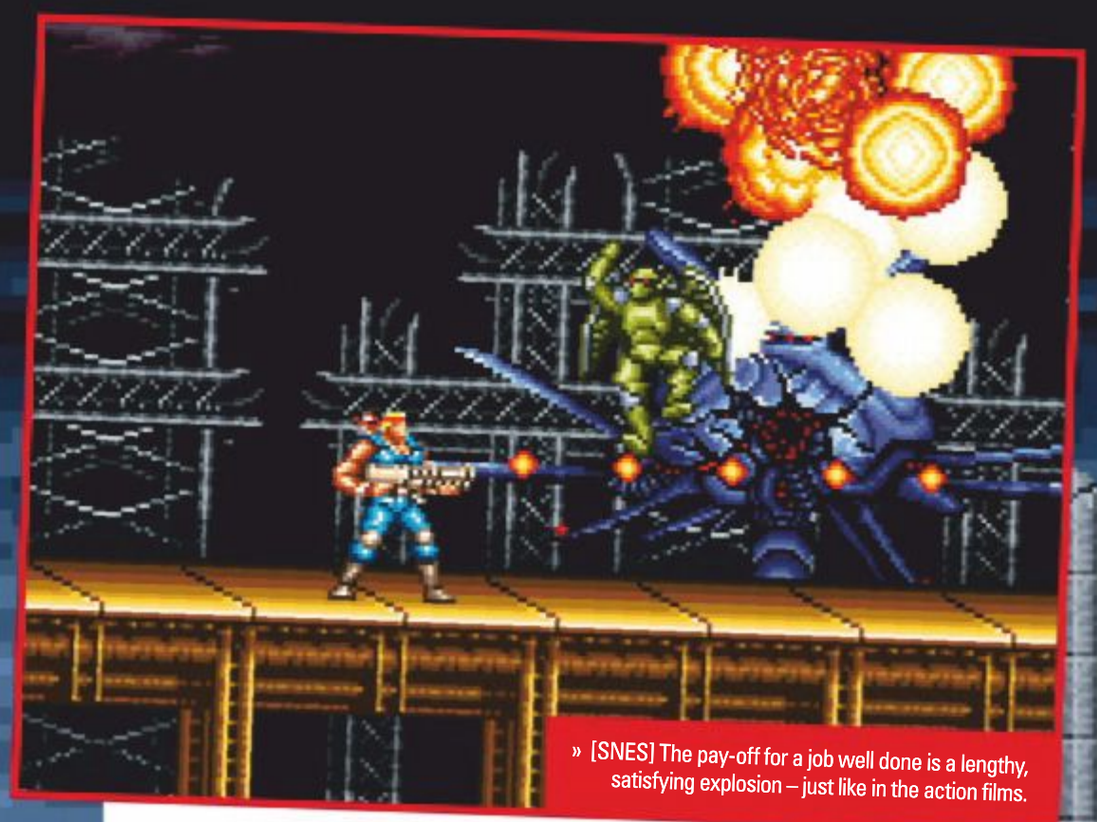
this excellence. A full selection of weapons was available, with the time-tested laser and spread guns joined by new additions like the homing gun, and co-op play was supported throughout the game. But what's most impressive is that the technical leap forward is matched by the inventive level design. The first stage is familiar *Contra* territory, a side-scrolling run through a decaying city, complete with a tank to ride and perilous fire traps. But the second stage rams home how all of the technical improvements were in service of the game design, as the overhead stage is now a fully rotating Mode 7 affair, enabling a nonlinear maze structure in which you have to seek out and destroy set targets before you can move on to the boss. During a co-op game, both players can even explore the overhead stage independently as the game employs a split-screen setup.

As you go on, the game never lets up with the inventive scenarios – the third stage sees you fighting minibosses while hanging from rails and walls, and the fourth starts with a high-speed jet bike chase before you take to the air. The fifth stage returns to the overhead view and the final stage takes you inside the alien lair, with a boss rush to conclude the game. And *Contra III*'s most impressive scenes were reserved for the boss fights, ranging from a huge skeletal robot crashing through the wall to a dangerous aerial battle where your character is hanging from moving missiles. We're still impressed by the second stage boss, a spider-like flying robot that manages to create the illusion of two rotating graphics layers using sprites with 32 predrawn rotations.

All of this was conveyed with dramatic audiovisual impact, as the SNES really allowed the team to go to town on making *Contra III* the most impressive game in the

» [SNES] For the most part, the final stage is a boss rush – there are few regular enemies to be found here.

JIMBO



» [SNES] The pay-off for a job well done is a lengthy, satisfying explosion – just like in the action films.

series. With 256 colours to play with at any time, lead designer and game director Nobuya Nakazato was able to convey a greater sense of detail in the sprites and backgrounds. Masayuki Saruta is credited with drawing the player characters, and as well as featuring more detail they have a range of additional animations, from climbing along walls and overhead bars to riding vehicles. Special effects are used liberally, too, with the SNES's mosaic effect used to convey damage on bosses rather than the traditional method of flashing different colours or blinking the sprite. The music was composed by Miki Higashino, Masanori Adachi, Tappi Iwase and Aki Hata, working to the brief of providing an impressive style reminiscent of Hollywood action movies. They succeeded spectacularly, with the orchestral parts particularly boosted by the SNES's unrivalled ability to utilise sampled audio. Each stage has a unique musical signature – the booming bass of the first stage's drums perfectly convey the gravity of the alien invasion, whereas the fourth stage has a much brighter, more energetic theme that fits the high speed and blue skies of that particular stage.

The game arrived in Japan under the name *Contra Spirits* in February 1992, and hit shelves in North America as *Contra III: The Alien Wars* in early April. These versions feature only minor differences, such as the removal of infinite continues in the US version. European SNES owners would

CONTRA COLLECTED

Series regular Nobuya Nakazato talks to us about Konami's upcoming Contra Anniversary Collection

» Nobuya Nakazato is the director of both Contra III and Hard Corps.

Konami's third compilation celebrating its 50th anniversary is dedicated to *Contra*. It will comprise several classics, including the arcade games *Contra* and *Super Contra*, the NES game *Super C*, the SNES's *Contra III: The Alien Wars* and the Mega Drive's *Contra: Hard Corps*. "I have not been directly involved in the day-to-day development of the *Contra Anniversary Collection*, however the team has been kind enough to keep me regularly updated and I have given my insight when needed," explains *Contra III* director Nobuya Nakazato. Konami has taken extra care with the *Contra* compilation to ensure that each player will be able to experience their favourites in the way they prefer. "Since both *Contra* and *Probotector* are included, everyone will have a chance to experience the series in a new way," he reveals. "Die-hard fans will be happy to know that for the first time we also offer 50Hz and 60Hz support for the *Probotector* games!"

After *Contra III*, Nakazato went on to direct *Contra: Hard Corps* and produce *Contra: Shattered Soldier*, *Neo Contra* and *Contra Rebirth*. Having had such a long relationship with the series, you'd expect that he was heavily involved in picking the compilation's line-up, but that's not the case. "As I was not leading the development of the compilation, I did not decide which games would be included. However, I'm very happy with the line-up the team decided on, as I feel that it will please the fans of the franchise," he says. But it turns out that deciding the line-up is probably a job Nakazato wouldn't have relished, due to his outlook on game development. "When I develop games, I always think that the next one I come up with will be the best one yet," he explains. "But ultimately it's the players who choose their favourite game and it varies from player to player, so it's not up to me to pick the best *Contra* game."

Contra Anniversary Collection is scheduled for release in early summer for PlayStation 4, Xbox One, Switch and PC.

CONVERSION CAPERS

Contra III also made appearances on portable platforms – but it didn't make the journey in one piece

GAME BOY

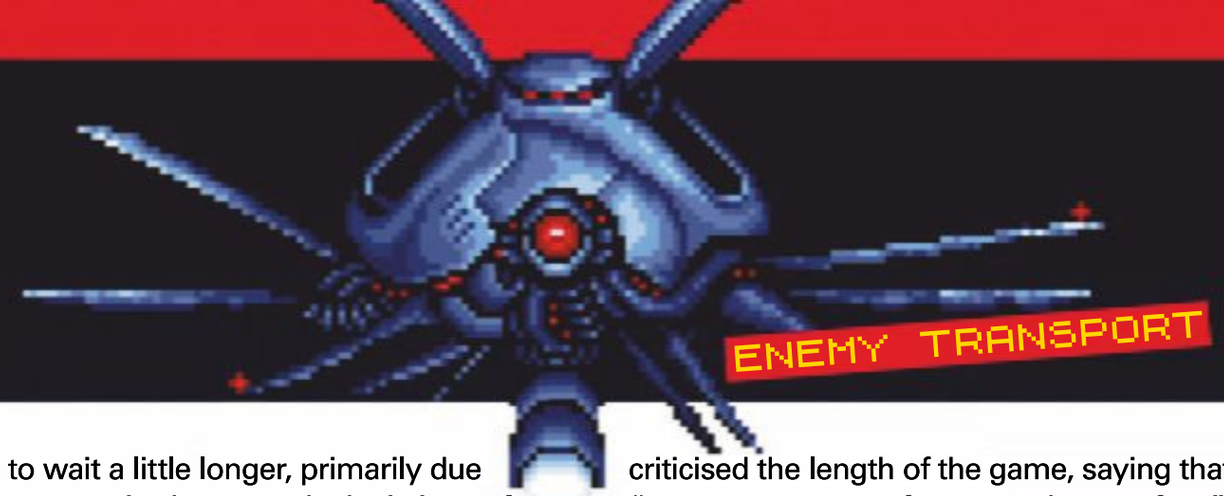
Given that Factor 5 was trying to squeeze an advanced SNES game into the most limited of consoles available, it shouldn't be a surprise that *Contra III* (*Contra Spirits* in Japan and *Probotector 2* in Europe) isn't a perfect port. The graphical excess has been pared back, a number of minibosses and the jet bike stage have been removed, and there's no rotation in the overhead stages.

Once you've got past that, it's fair to say that the team managed to pull off a credible imitation that retains much of the original game's character. However, there are some things which don't work in its favour. It's not a fast game in the way that *Contra* titles usually are, and enemies have been made more resilient to make up for their diminished numbers. It's a good attempt, but not perfect.

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Contra Advance: The Alien Wars EX, or *Contra: Hard Spirits* in Japan, was released in 2002 and ranks as one of the least faithful SNES conversions on the system. Some changes would be expected – for example, graphics were brightened to compensate for the dark screen of the original GBA. Likewise the smaller viewing area, which is due to the console's 240x160 resolution.

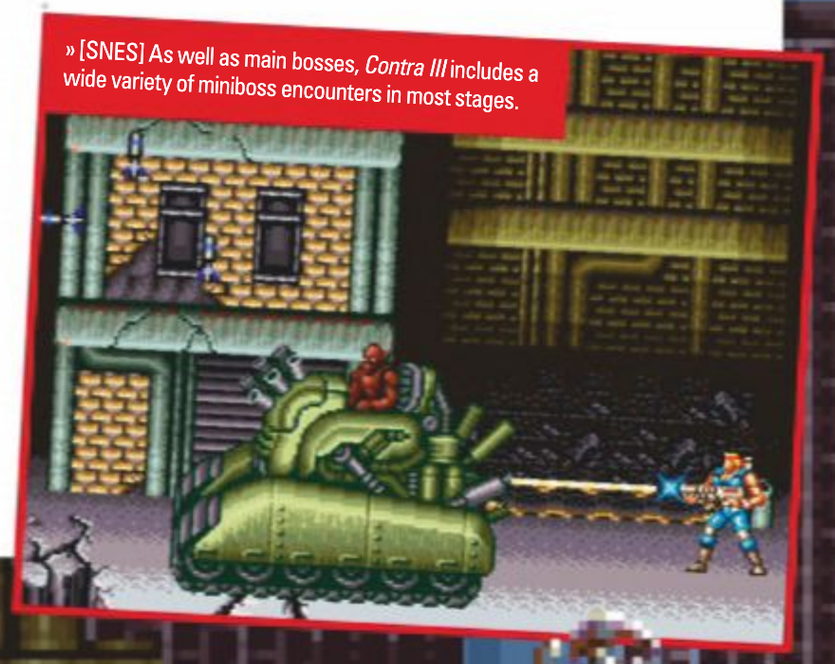
However, this conversion hacks out some pretty substantial features. It's no longer possible to use bombs, nor can you switch between two held weapons. Hard mode is gone, and easy mode cuts off after the fourth stage. But the biggest change is that the two Mode 7 stages have been cut out of the game and replaced with a couple of stages from *Contra: Hard Corps*. They're still good, but... why?



have to wait a little longer, primarily due to German attitudes towards depictions of humans engaging in violence – in keeping with prior games in the series, the main characters were replaced with robots. PAL players were finally treated to *Super Probotector: Alien Rebels* in November 1992. However, subsequent releases have seen the *Probotector* brand and edits dropped – the original Wii Virtual Console received *Super Probotector*, but European players received *Contra III* via the 3DS and Wii U Virtual Console services, as well as the SNES Mini.

Many magazines in the UK jumped straight on the Japanese version, and came away impressed. In *Mean Machines*, Richard Leadbetter stated that Konami had "incorporated every Super NES graphics trick in the book, and added plenty of new ones" in a 95% review. *N-Force* scored the game 92%, noting "it's the sheer amount of stuff going on – attacks, bullets and power-ups zooming in from every direction – that makes the speed even more surprising". In *CVG*'s 91% review, Frank O'Connor praised the fact that the game's use of Mode 7 "isn't just a gimmick, it's an intrinsic part of the gameplay." *Super Play Gold* reviewed the European version and scored it 90%, concluding that *Super Probotector* "tops any obvious rivals" but criticised the length of the game, saying that it "seems to run out of steam rather too fast."

Unfortunately, the team behind this incredible game would not stick together for a sequel. Programmers Yaida and Suginami went off to work at Treasure, where they worked on *Gunstar Heroes*, and most of the other staff scattered off to other projects at Konami. By the time *Contra: Hard Corps* was developed for the Mega Drive, Nobuya Nakazato found himself directing a largely different development team, though it's worth noting that it turned out to be excellent, too. Even if a sequel had appeared on the SNES, it's hard to see how it could have improved things – and really, the fact that we want more just proves how good *Contra III* was to begin with. So if it's been a while since you've experienced it, grab a friend and revisit a game that delivers that action movie feel like nothing else of its era. ✱



» [SNES] As well as main bosses, *Contra III* includes a wide variety of miniboss encounters in most stages.

"The technical leap forward is matched by the inventive level design"

» [SNES] The ability to climb walls and rails added more movement options and created some classic moments.

BOSS RUSH

Contra III has some of the best boss fights of the 16-bit era – here's a complete rundown of the big ones

STAGE 1

■ Your first major foe looks like a big, ugly biomechanical tortoise. Its mouth is rather dangerous – it can spit up more enemies and fire a powerful laser.

HOW TO BEAT IT

Underneath the neck and in front of the front legs, you'll see that the boss has an obvious red weak spot. Use the platforms to dodge the enemy's attacks, and aim for the weak spot whenever reasonably possible.

STAGE 2

■ This robot is a bit like a spider, but with six legs rather than eight. The small central 'body' has a flashing red target where you would expect to see a head.

HOW TO BEAT IT

First, you'll need to destroy the circular targets at the end of each of the robot's legs. Once that's done, it will start jumping and attempting to land on you. Avoid it, and fire at the red target when it lands.

STAGE 3

■ Two robots look suspiciously like they have wandered in from *Snatcher*, and they're accompanied by a terrifyingly huge robot friend.

HOW TO BEAT IT

The robots will attack both high and low, so cling to the ceiling until the bottom one starts firing, then drop behind it and attack. Once the big guy shows up, watch out for the chasing lasers and aim for the head.

STAGE 4

■ You'll fight this giant airship during the stage, but the boss fight takes place entirely in the air. Thankfully, you only encounter its well-protected rear.

HOW TO BEAT IT

The boss is protected by a shield, which has a two turrets placed at its top and bottom. Destroy those, and then aim for the gigantic red target – but watch out, as it will start to target the missiles you're riding.

STAGE 5

■ This looks like some sort of creepy, horrible hive, complete with what appears to be a clawed tentacle, but is in fact a worm-like second creature.

HOW TO BEAT IT

Aim for the eye in the centre, while avoiding the worm. Once you've hit it enough, the worm will chase you further and the ground will shift, so you'll need to counteract the rotation with the shoulder buttons.

STAGE 6

■ This is it – the big bad alien, a living embodiment of extraterrestrial terror. It begins as a multi-mouthed monstrosity and even its brain can put up a fight.

HOW TO BEAT IT

In the first phase, knock out its arms before firing at its head. During the brain phase, you choose its attack pattern – memorise what each does and aim for the brain. And don't relax when the chopper takes off!

THE UNCONVERTED

Arcade games that never made it home

ASTERIX

DEVELOPER: **KONAMI** YEAR: **1992** GENRE: **BEAT-'EM-UP**

■ Konami's chunky and bright four-player cartoon beat-'em-ups, notably *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* and *The Simpsons*, along with the even larger six-player *X-Men* cabinet, were a regular staple of arcades, cinema foyers and bowling alleys in the Nineties. But for some reason this beautifully crafted coin-op reworking of the world-famous *Asterix* comic book series was a far rarer find. And that's a shame, because, despite being for only two players, it's arguably more enjoyable than all the aforementioned games.

Starring the eponymous wing-helmeted Gaul, the game sees Asterix and his sidekick, the menhir-obsessed Obelix, travelling the known world in a similar manner to the books, on the way paffing legions of hapless Romans into next week. The presentation, tone and visual design of the game is remarkably close to the original Albert Uderzo artwork, from the animation and facial expressions to the stylised comic-style fisticuffs and the elegant book-cover homages introducing each stage.

Fans of the comics will enjoy looking out for characters like the druid Getafix, tone-deaf bard Cacofonix, and the glamorous Panacea as Asterix and Obelix travel from their village in Gaul to locations like Egypt, Britain, Spain and eventually the Colosseum Of Rome itself. Along the way there are excursions on boats, magic carpets and chariot races, along with copious imbibing of magic potions and consuming of boar, carried on-screen by faithful pooch Dogmatix. Potions, of course, mean extra Romans piled up seeing stars or flying into space by the hand of our pint-sized super Gaul, while a roast boar power-up sends his brawny pal Obelix into a clobbering frenzy capable of almost single-handedly bringing down Caesar's empire.

All in all, the game is a real hoot to play, especially with two people 'accidentally' smacking each other when they get in the way of the centurions. In fact, we would go so far as to say that this is still probably the best licensed *Asterix* game out there, and it's regrettable that the title never received a home conversion, meaning a lot of potential fans missed out on playing it back in the day.

■ Dogmatix appears carrying magic potions which are to Asterix what spinach is to Popeye. Obelix's power-up is a wild boar.

■ Asterix and Obelix can wind up a powerful punch by holding down a button for a few seconds near a baddie. Pull it off and most Roman enemies will be sent flying.

■ The delightful Panacea makes an entrance at certain times, such as here on the Egyptian stage. Approaching her grants you a health-boosting kiss.

■ These centurions are a fair bit tougher than the standard fist-fodder that Asterix and Obelix make short work of throughout the game.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

THE SIMPSONS

1991

■ One of Konami's most famous arcade brawlers, *The Simpsons* also captured its source material brilliantly and made it out of the arcades in the form of a surprisingly decent port on the Commodore 64. In more recent years it was available on Xbox Live and PSN, but has now been delisted.

LIGHTNING FIGHTERS

DEVELOPER: **KONAMI** YEAR: **1990** GENRE: **SHOOT-'EM-UP**

■ **While Konami is known for its horizontal format shoot-'em-ups, notably *Nemesis* (aka *Gradius*), *Salamander* and *Parodius*, it produced a number of vertical shooters, and this *Raiden*-style blaster is possibly its finest.** Released in Japan as *Trigon*, the game is notable for its two-player co-op mode, where grabbing a certain pick-up item attaches the powerful Trigon weapon midway between both your ships. Depending on which of the three Trigon varieties collected, this can give you a whopping great laser cannon which can be aimed around the screen, depending on the accuracy of both players' synchronised formation flying, and its an incredibly neat and, as far as we're aware, completely unique concept in vertical shooters.

Running on the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* hardware, *Lightning Fighters* is a great looking shmup for its time, featuring snazzy effects, such as the boss mothership that morphs into the screen from above, and the game's iconic roaring dragon laser smart bomb. Unfortunately, the Western release removed the Trigon weapon from the one-player game. Thankfully, the two-player mode remains the same as the Japanese version.

» [Arcade] *Lightning Fighters* proved that Konami was just as capable at making vertical shmups.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

RAIDEN 2

SEIBU KAIHATSU

■ First appearing in arcades in 1990, the *Raiden* series is one of the few shooter franchises still going, with its most recent outing, *Raiden 5*, released on Xbox One and PS4 in 2016. *Raiden 2* remains a favourite, and the excellent *Raiden Project* package contains it and the original *Raiden* for PlayStation.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

ALTERED BEAST

1988

■ An obvious influence on *Metamorphic Force*, Sega's scrolling beat-'em-up was a rather creative blend of fantastic beasts and Greek mythology, although it's a much tougher title overall. Many Sega Mega Drive owners will be familiar with it due to the port that came bundled with a lot of their consoles.

METAMORPHIC FORCE

DEVELOPER: **KONAMI** YEAR: **1993** GENRE: **BEAT-'EM-UP**

■ ***Metamporphic Force* was one of Konami's final arcade brawlers, and along with Asterix, is also one of its most graphically impressive.** The game is best described as *Altered Beast* spliced with the DNA of *Thundercats*, with four pseudo-immortal cartoon-style heroes possessing beast-transforming properties solely for the purpose of beating things up.

Similar to how *Altered Beast* had you rising from your grave courtesy of Zeus in order to rescue his daughter Athena, in *Metamorphic Force* it's Athena who brings you back to banish an ancient evil. What it is with Greek deities resurrecting folk and turning them into undead versions of Manimal? We're not sure, but for the purposes of this feature we're just going to go along with it. The game really captures the spirit of cartoons from the Eighties, and we can picture its heroes going toe-to-toe with the likes of He-Man or Cheetara

The animal transformation theme is enjoyably hokey, with the added bonus of letting players discover the nuances between werewolves, werepumas, wereoxes and our favourite, a werebear who likes to knock people over then sit on them.

» [Arcade] Imagine *Altered Beast* amped up to 11 and you've got Konami's *Metamorphic Force*.

BEST LEFT IN THE ARCADE

MIA – MISSING IN ACTION

DEVELOPER: **KONAMI** YEAR: **1989** GENRE: **ACTION**

■ **This sequel of sorts to *Green Beret* (aka *Rush'n Attack*) seems heavily influenced by *Rambo: First Blood Part II*... if John Rambo was armed with nothing but a combat knife for most of the duration of the film, that is.** Tasked with rescuing a number of POWs from the jungles of Vietnam, you'll soon find that it's time to get stabby with hordes of enemies that have opted for the fatally suicidal tactic of running straight into your stumpy, yet incredibly deadly, blade.

Occasionally you pick up special weapons (grenades, machine guns or bazookas) but the slow speed of firing compared to the stabbing action of your knife, plus the fact that your power-ups only seem to contain a handful of bullets, renders them mostly useless.

It's also worth noting that *MIA – Missing In Action* is a ludicrously difficult game, frequently overwhelming your poor soldier with scores of enemies from all sides. It's one of the better examples of a cynical arcade coin-muncher. If you're looking for some Eighties action film coin-op nostalgia, we would recommend you go hunting for the original *Green Beret*, or better still, *Rolling Thunder* or perhaps the excellent *Elevator Action Returns*.

Transfer Pak Fact

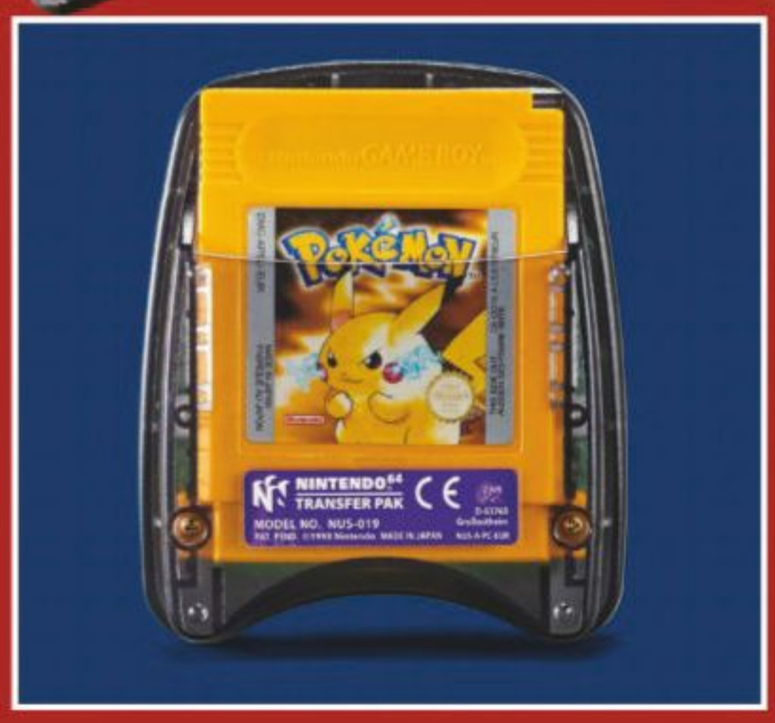
■ The Transfer Pak is region-free and visually almost identical in every region. The only distinguishing mark is the label on the rear, which bears a product code that tells you where yours came from.

Transfer Pak

» **PLATFORM:** N64
» **RELEASED:** 1999
» **COST:** £12.99 (LAUNCH), £8+ (NOW)

To take advantage of its unique position as the only company promoting both a home and handheld console during the late Nineties, Nintendo created the Transfer Pak peripheral to encourage interaction between Game Boy and N64 games. The device connects to the expansion port of the N64 controller, and features a slot for Game Boy and Game Boy Color cartridges at a right angle. The resulting device isn't particularly pretty, and adds a considerable amount of size and weight to the controller, but it does get the job done.

The Transfer Pak is most commonly associated with HAL Laboratory's *Pokémon Stadium*, as it was bundled with the game. However, the device was available separately and there were 17 compatible N64 games, including *Perfect Dark*, *Mario Tennis* and *Mario Golf*. 11 games that supported the device were only released in Japan, including the ones with arguably the most interesting uses – *Mario Artist* for the 64DD add-on allowed images to be imported using the Game Boy Camera, and *PD Ultraman Battle Collection 64* could generate random characters using the data of any Game Boy game. However, many games weren't as interesting as these examples, and simply allowed for characters to be unlocked using the Transfer Pak. ✱



ESSENTIAL GAME POKÉMON STADIUM 2

This is the ultimate evolution of the *Pokémon Stadium* concept on N64, offering full 3D battles and a variety of minigames. The Transfer Pak allows you to transfer your team from any of the first two generations of *Pokémon* games from the handheld to the big screen, as well as transferring exclusive Pokémon to your Game Boy game. If two Transfer Paks are present, you can trade Pokémon without a Game Boy link cable. The device even allows you to actually play the games on your TV, complete with Super Game Boy-style borders and the option to speed up gameplay.

After Burner was one of Sega's most popular coin-ops, so it was no surprise to see it return to the jet fighter theme with G-LOC, an arcade game that, in its R360 incarnation, would literally turn your world upside down

Words by Martyn Carroll

ULTIMATE GUIDE:

G-LOC AIR BATTLE

LOSS OF CONSCIOUSNESS BY G FORCE

In 1990 Sega issued a glossy flyer for its 'High-Entertainment Gamer Series', which was its own moniker for the deluxe versions of its 'Super Scaler' games. All of these top-of-the-range titles were listed in chronological order, starting with *Hang-On* and its famous 'Ride-On' bike and including such memorable cockpit cabs as *Space Harrier*, *Out Run*, *After Burner* and *Power Drift*. If you needed reminding why Sega ruled the arcades during the latter half of the Eighties then this was it – a combination of outstanding games housed inside incredible cabs. And there, 11th in line, was its latest 'Hi-Entertainment' release, *G-LOC* (named after the aerospace term 'loss of consciousness by G-force'). Could it continue the winning run?

The moving sit-down cab was another weighty beast, sharing dimensions and aesthetics with Sega's deluxe cab for *Galaxy Force*. But unlike that machine, movement was generated by two hydraulic cylinders at the rear that worked independently to replicate the pitch and roll of a real jet fighter. It was very responsive, with a flick of the flight stick leading to immediate motion. The cab also featured a speed throttle (complete with afterburner button), operated by the player's left hand. Two standard variations were also available – a nonmoving sit-down cab and the usual space-saving upright model.

The deluxe cab was certainly thrilling, but could the same be said about the game itself? Many have questioned why it wasn't released as a direct sequel to Sega's earlier hit *After Burner*, as it was another *Top Gun*-inspired shooter from the Yu Suzuki stable, but the reason is obvious: *G-LOC* played quite differently. Compared to the frantic action of *After Burner*, it was a curiously muted affair with mild sim leanings.

It was first-person for a start, with the player positioned inside the cockpit. On occasion an enemy jet or homing missile would lock onto you and the viewpoint would be sucked backwards to show the impending danger, but this was a first-person game. The pace of the game was fairly sedate, too, and anyone who had been thrilled by *After Burner* would likely be left apathetic. You couldn't criticise the hardware – the game was

» [Arcade] The canyon stages add some welcome variation to the aerial dogfighting.

» [Arcade] Expert mode introduces night fighting and, crucially, upside-down flying.

CONVERSION CAPERS

We let the various home versions dogfight it out

COMMODORE 64

■ And you thought the C64 version of *After Burner* was dire. Bad graphics, poor presentation and turgid gameplay shoot down this turkey from US Gold. In-game audio amounts to a constant high-pitched wailing. *Zzap!64* gave this 35%, which was generous.

ZX SPECTRUM

■ This one will leave you feeling black and blue – and that's just the graphics. The monochrome display is far from appealing, but the game does run at a decent pace and offers up a solid challenge. It's nothing special, though it does play to the strengths of the Speccy.

AMSTRAD CPC

■ Very similar to the Spectrum version, as you'd expect, but benefiting hugely from colour graphics (you know when you've scored a hit as you actually see the enemy explode into flames). Speed isn't sacrificed, either, and overall it's an above-average conversion.

AMIGA

■ This widely-maligned version (*Amiga Power* awarded it 7%) is not actually that bad. The graphics are basic and the scenery is sparse, but it plays pretty well, particularly when you use the mouse as a controller. The arcade attract mode is replicated, too.

» A punter takes a spin on the R360 that was once located in Ontario's Skylon Tower.

running on the same ridiculous triple-68000, Y-board hardware as *Galaxy Force* and *Power Drift*, yet *G-LOC* felt like the lazy, slightly scruffy cousin of those remarkable games.

There was a trick, however. The game offered three difficulty levels – beginner (eight stages), medium (12 stages) and expert (16 stages). If you'd just waited your turn and paid up to a pound to play, it's likely you'd choose beginner or medium to extend your playing time. Yet it was the expert level where *G-LOC* really came to life. The controls were much more responsive and you could fly upside down at will. Fans of *After Burner* looking for similar thrills simply had to select the expert mode, but how many did?

***G-LOC* didn't received unanimous praise in the gaming press.** "I can't think of a bigger disappointment this year," commented the reliable Robin Hogg in *Zzap!64*. "*After Burner* had more action, more pace and more style."Jaz Rignall awarded it 86% in *C&VG*, while the guys at *Sinclair User* were even more enamoured with it, calling it one of the firm's finest. "*G-LOC* is another quantum leap ahead for Sega," the mag commented in a 95% review. "Although the gameplay is not that varied, it's better than *After Burner*. This one you have to play."

G-LOC would soon hit even greater heights, thanks to its attachment to Sega's most ambitious and outrageous simulator yet. The main purpose of the flyer mentioned in the opening was to introduce the R360, a full-motion machine designed by Sega cabinet engineer Masao Yoshimoto. Players were spun inside a large gyroscope – and yes, that meant being turned fully upside down, hence the safety belt and over-the-shoulder restraint required to prevent players from getting flipped from the machine!

A special R360 version of *G-LOC* was developed to showcase Sega's wild new ride. The difficulty levels were dropped, replaced by two modes: the passive Experience Course, where riders were taken for a short spin with no control over the action, and the proper Fighting Course, where players had two minutes to shoot down as many enemy fighters as possible. Then it was time to alight and let the next person in the queue climb aboard.

If you were lucky enough to experience the R360 then you'll appreciate the impact it had on players at the time. "When you play [*G-LOC*] in the R360 it becomes a completely astonishing experience," wrote *Sinclair User* in 1991. "Cynics might say that the R360 is simply like playing games inside a tumble dryer, but the fact is not one person has come off the

"For the time the G-LOC arcade hardware was impressive and you just couldn't compete with that on the Mega Drive"

Stuart Gregg

ATARI ST

■ Surprise surprise – almost identical to the Amiga version. The HUD has been simplified and the speech samples ("Fire! Fire!") are missing, but it's otherwise a commendable effort. Whether you'd agree if you paid full price for it back in the day is another matter.

GAME GEAR

■ Squeezing *G-LOC* onto the Game Gear seems like madness, but this remodelled version is surprisingly effective. It's well presented (polygon-style graphics make up the terrain) and it's possible to upgrade your jet. There's even a versus mode for Gear-to-Gear dogfights.

MASTER SYSTEM

■ Unrelated to the Game Gear version, this typically eccentric Master System release introduces various embellishments – including boss fights! And why not? The core game is a fast and enjoyable blast that throws everything at the player and barely lets up for a second.

MEGA DRIVE

■ Arriving late to the party in 1993, the Mega Drive game is the best of the home versions. The gameplay is close enough to the arcade original to forgive some of the visual shortcomings, and there are enough enhancements (just) to encourage repeat plays.

» [Arcade] Having evaded the enemy ace, slow down and lock him in your sights.

» [Arcade] On the Fighting Course your challenge is to amass as many hits as possible within two minutes.

Q&A: STUART GREGG

We speak to the coder behind the Mega Drive version for Probe Software

Do you know why Probe undertook this conversion, as Sega often handled its own console ports?
Sorry I don't know for sure, but I think it was a trial by Sega to see how it went.

Did you have access to the original coin-op?
I didn't have the machine but I made a few trips to the arcades to play the game. I did have lots of playthrough videos that really helped, though.

The Mega Drive version adds several new elements not seen in the coin-op. Were you given free rein to embellish the original, or were the additions requested by Sega?
I wasn't the original programmer, Dave Perry was. He left, moving to Virgin in the US to work on *Aladdin*. I picked it up from Dave after the initial designs had been done. It was a joint effort on the changes but it was something Sega wanted to do from the get-go. Sega understood that the Mega Drive couldn't compete with the arcade hardware, so some extras were required.

» [Mega Drive] Bonus points were awards for shooting down the coloured enemy jets.

» [Mega Drive] Commanders and comrades would pop up between stages to give you mission orders.

What was the biggest technical challenge in delivering the Mega Drive version?
The hardware, but that's always the case with arcade conversions. For the time the *G-LOC* arcade hardware was impressive and you just couldn't compete with that on the Mega Drive.

Were you pleased with how the game turned out, and, looking back, would you have done anything differently?
I was very self-critical of games when I had just finished them, so I was pleased it was over [laughs]. I was recently playing some of my old games on RetroPie and to be honest I was pleasantly surprised by *G-LOC*. It's better than I remembered.

EXPLORING THE R360

Taking a closer look at Sega's state-of-the-art simulator

GYROSCOPE BODY
■ The gyroscope rapidly spins players 360 degrees in all directions. A seat belt and harness inside the cockpit keeps the occupant safely strapped in.

COCKPIT MONITOR
■ The action is displayed on a 20-inch CRT monitor (same as the deluxe version of *G-LOC*). The display is replicated on a smaller ten-inch monitor built into the attendant tower.

EMERGENCY STOP BUTTON
■ If the rider feels unwell, they can hit the large red button inside the cockpit to stop the machine and alert the attendant to the issue.

SAFETY BARRIER
■ A barrier was positioned around the machine to keep spectators away from the spinning gyroscope. The ride would stop if the area was encroached.

ATTENDANT CONSOLE
■ The R360 was designed with a dedicated attendant in mind. The attendant was able to control the machine from this special tower.

MEAN MACHINE

Craig Walker is lucky enough to own a working R360 running G-LOC

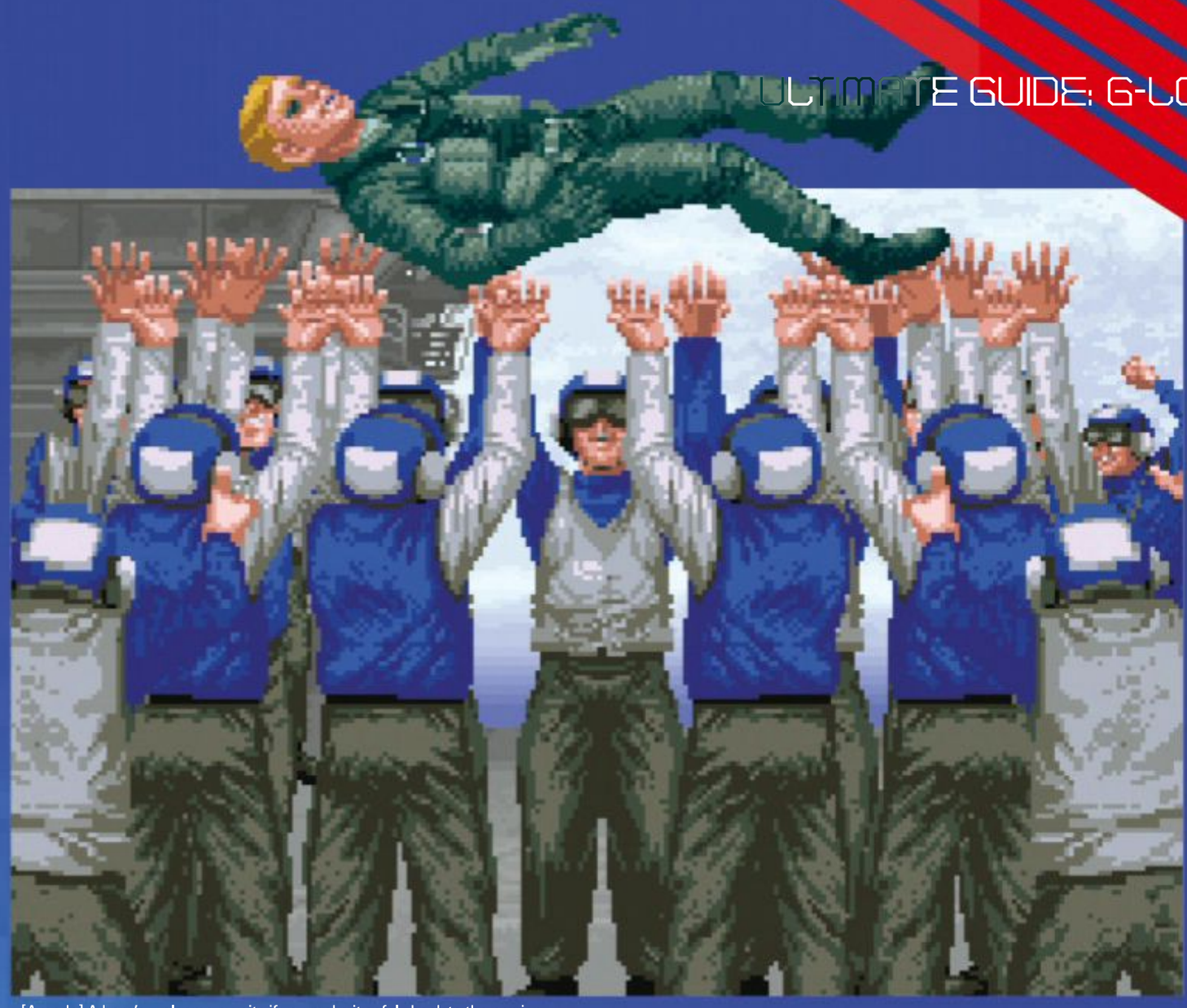
What's the history of your R360 machine? Where was it originally based and how did you acquire it?
It was initially sited in Mr B's arcade on Blackpool seafront. Many years later it was moved to Metroland at the Metrocentre in Gateshead, where it eventually developed a fault which Sega said could not be repaired due to lack of parts. It was then listed on eBay to see if anyone would buy it before it was cut up for scrap. I went to look at it and made an offer.

They were going to scrap it?
The reason was that there was only one door that was wide enough for it to fit through. Even then it had to be moved though the full length of the Metrocentre in two parts. It then had to make its way down the multistorey car park. It wasn't for the faint-hearted. I was later told that they caused many thousands of pounds worth of damage to the floor when they originally moved it in there.

What is the current condition of your R360 machine?
It's fully working, midway though a restoration. It's running *G-LOC* at the moment and I'm about to plumb in *Wing War* at some point.

What's the overall goal for your R360?
To keep it running! Everything on the R360 is bespoke apart from the PCB running the game and the motor drive units, so there isn't much hope of spares. If it breaks you have to fix it and there are no schematics available. The exact model of motor drive isn't that common, either.

Why do you feel the R360 is so fondly remembered by arcade fans?
In my opinion the R360 is the pinnacle of what could be achieved in videogames at the time and shows the dominance Sega had in the industry. The vision for it was way ahead of anything else.

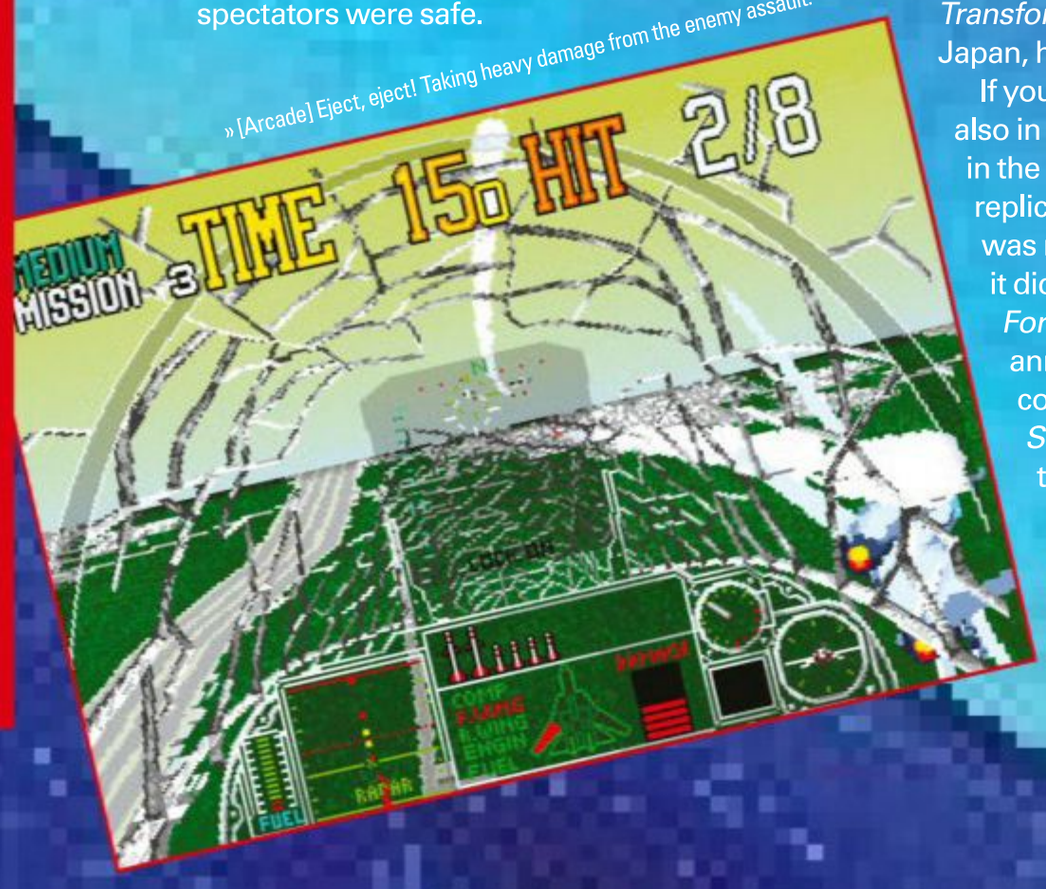


» [Arcade] A hero's welcome awaits if you make it safely back to the carrier.

"The R360 is the pinnacle of what could be achieved in videogames at the time and shows the dominance Sega had in the industry"
Craig Walker

machine and not [been] convinced that this is the future of videogames."

We all know that journos have good form when it comes to making bold statements about the future of videogames. It's clear now that the R360 was always destined to be an amazing curio rather than an arcade mainstay. Only select venues could take it, due to its huge size (the installation occupied 20 square metres, including a safety barrier) and prohibitive cost (£70,000 in the UK). It was also expected that a dedicated ride attendant was present at all times to monitor the machine and make sure riders or spectators were safe.



» [Arcade] Eject, eject! Taking heavy damage from the enemy assault.

Sega only modified one more title for use with the R360 and that was the 1994 Model 1 title *Wing War*. It's rumoured that a version of *After Burner* was used for internal testing, and photos from a Japanese trade show reveal that *Rad Mobile* was trialled on the R360 (now *that* would have been interesting), but neither title was officially released. Sega manufactured 150 R360s in total, and of those it's thought that maybe only 20 are still around, and only some of these will be operational. If you missed the R360 first time around you'll be pleased to hear that Sega hasn't abandoned the concept completely. In 2015 it unveiled an updated two-player model dubbed the R360Z which runs a modified version of the shooting game *Transformers Human Alliance*. It's only available in Japan, however.

If you want to experience *G-LOC* then you're also in luck. Various home versions were released in the early Nineties, but none came close to replicating the arcade original. Curiously there was no Saturn or Dreamcast version, and it didn't even join *Power Drift* and *Galaxy Force* on the 3DS. Yet earlier this year it was announced that a faithful port would be coming to the Nintendo Switch as part of the *Sega Ages* series. Once again you'll be able to barrel roll across a blue Sega sky – even if it won't turn your world upside down.

Many thanks to Sara Zielinski and Craig Walker for providing photos and information. Visit their R360 Fan Club page on Facebook.

RUNNING WITH SCISSORS™

Running With Scissors has proclaimed itself as the "world's most dangerous software company" and it has been knocking back critics since it formed. Vince Desi sharpens his memory and shoots through its controversial history

Words by David Crookes

If your mother ever told you not to run with scissors, then she would certainly have warned you against playing a violently anarchic, boundary-shifting murder romp starring a gunman rampaging through a town. After all, killing people going about their daily life tends to be something that ends up on a rolling television news channel rather than something you do for fun. Yet that was the premise of *Postal*, Running With Scissors' long-running series. And, as you can imagine, it got the studio into heaps of trouble from the start.

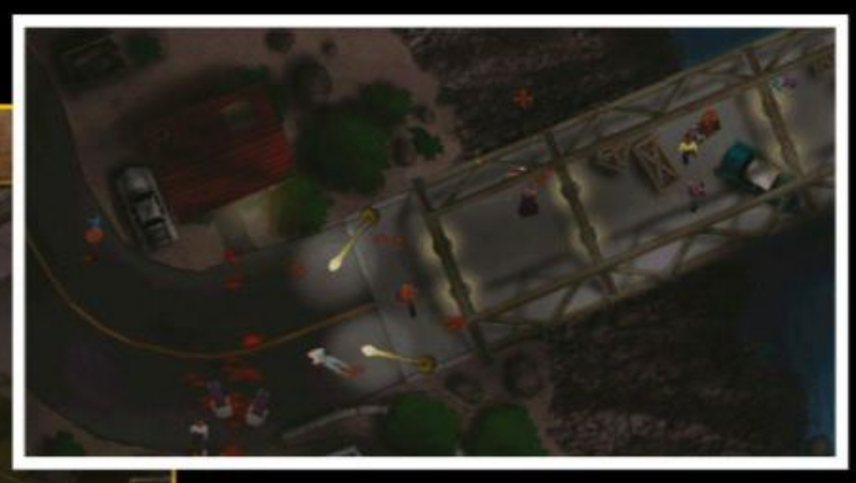
Blamed for the stabbing of eight people in a Moscow synagogue? Sure. Banned from New Zealand? Absolutely. Dubbed "digital poison" by US Senator Joseph Lieberman who also sought to have it ripped from shop shelves? That, says Vince Desi, the CEO and founder of Running With Scissors, piqued the interest of the media and the game began to be pulled by CompUSA and Wal-Mart. But Vince is adamant his company wasn't seeking such adverse publicity. "Controversy was never part of the plan," he says.

Rather, the idea behind Running With Scissors was to break away from the mundanity of making games for children, something Vince, who began his career in the early Eighties working as a consultant with Atari, had done for half a decade with Riedel Software Production – a company he cofounded with Mike Jaret Riedel after moving from New York to Tuscon, Arizona in 1991.

RSP's first game was *Spy Vs Spy,* and it also worked on titles including *Tom & Jerry and Bobby's World* for the SNES. "It was a work-for-hire dev company that specialised in edutainment, hence the games were supposed to have an educational element," Vince says.

FAIR WARNING:
POSTAL™ IS INTENDED FOR "MATURE" AUDIENCES. IT CONTAINS SCENES OF GRAPHIC AND SENSELESS VIOLENCE. YOU MUST BE 17 OR OLDER TO PLAY.
MATURE
M
AGES 17+
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB
WARNING
This is a computer game and is meant solely for entertainment purposes.
This game contains content and materials not recommended for children and/or those seeking to enhance or establish political careers.
Running With Scissors believes violence and inappropriate actions belong in video games and not the real world. In no event should anyone attempt to recreate or mimic any of the actions, events or situations occurring in this game.

» *Postal* warns from the very start that it's a mature game which only adults should be allowed to play. *Postal 2* also said it wasn't for people seeking to enhance their political careers.



» [PC] The original isometric viewpoint of *Postal* was particularly striking thanks to the hand-drawn graphics

» [PC] The marching band first appears on the fourth level of *Postal* and the Postal Dude can attack it. A marching band appears in *Postal 2,* too.

"I always approached every new game with excitement and curiosity but there were obvious limitations, whether from the publisher or licensor." Indeed, by 1996, the team was getting tired of kids games. "The creative lid was ready to blow," Vince tells us, "and *Postal* provided the perfect outlet to explode on."

***Postal* was Running With Scissors' first game and its name was a reference to the phrase 'going postal' – coined when nine postal employees shot 29 fellow workers dead in nine separate incidents between 1985 and 1995.** Its premise was to play a brooding gunman, referred to as 'Postal Dude', who was intent on embarking on a murder spree and it was inspired by an original *Robotron: 2084* coin-op located in RSP's office.

From the start, the intention was for RWS to run alongside the existing company as an edgier label. "Profits from RSP were going to help pay for *Postal* and future RWS titles and the main goal was to create a new intellectual property that we would not only own but be able to have the freedom to express whatever we wanted," Vince says. "Back then *Doom* and *Warcraft* were the most popular games, so it was very natural for us to think in a new direction."

The two companies had three development teams working at once. "The primary group of seven was making *Postal,* another group was making an edutainment game based on the movie *Free Willy,* and the third was a straight educational title for an academic publisher," Vince continues. *Postal,* he says, was intended to be "a social expression of the world around us while providing pure adrenaline relief". "Funny thing is, the original *Postal* was taken far more seriously than we designed or intended." And so the controversy began.

The United States Postal Service brought a trademark suit against RWS in 1997. It ran for six years but failed. "We got a letter from the Postmaster General and, next, the FBI were calling," Vince says. RWS was also defending itself on TV, radio and in the press. Parents were up in arms, governments were taking action. When press agent Mark Shander donned a RWS T-shirt and popped to the local Post Office, a lady spat on him.

But Vince and his team began to embrace the backlash. A press junket to Tucson involved giving 30 journalists real guns. A work trip to Las Vegas saw a drunken Vince end up in the copilot seat of the rented aeroplane. The boss went on national television against Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee who was blaming violence in videogames for sparking shooting sprees. When the governor read *Postal*'s advert and box copy on air, people called the station's switchboard asking where they could buy it.

"I was truly surprised by the banning and blacklisting," Vince says. "It made no sense to me. I knew *Postal* was different as it introduced several new items in gaming but I really felt they were insanely comical and over-the-top, and I never thought or intended it to be offensive, and still don't. Some considered it to be more of a psychological horror thriller and I can feel that theme in the soundtrack and script." Vince also says the general response by the media and industry was hypocritical.

» [PC] You couldn't actually shoot up the school at the end of *Postal,* which is just as well because that really would have crossed the line.

TIMELINE

1991 ■ Riedel Software Productions (RSP) is cofounded by Vince Desi and Mike Riedel.

1996 ■ Fed up of making kids games, Vince forms Running With Scissors (RWS).

1997 ■ As the United States Postal Service learns of *Postal*'s development, it sues.

■ *Postal* is released to a massive backlash due to its murderous content.

1998 ■ *Postal* expansion *Special Delivery* is released, bringing a bunch of new content.

1999 ■ Sci-fi game *Flesh And Wire* is among three canned games as Running With Scissors shifts to concentrate on *Postal*.

2000 ■ *Super Postal* is released in Japan.

2002 ■ *Postal Plus*, *Postal* with the *Special Delivery* add-on included, is released.

2003 ■ *Postal 2* is launched.

2004 ■ *Postal 2* is banned in New Zealand and, a year later, in Australia

■ Expansion pack *Apocalypse Weekend* is released for *Postal 2.*

2005 ■ *Postal* is sold online, making it available in countries where it was banned.

2007 ■ A movie version of *Postal* is cowritten and directed by Uwe Boll.

2009 ■ GOG.com begins to distribute *Postal Plus* and *Postal 2.*

■ A game based on the 'Postal Babes' is developed for mobile.

2011 ■ *Postal III* gets a fiercely critical reception.

2012 ■ RWS stops selling *Postal III.*

2013 ■ *Postal Plus* is given widescreen support.

2015 ■ *Postal 2: Paradise Lost* is released.

2016 ■ *Postal Redux* is released for Windows-based PCs.

2017 ■ *Postal XX: 20th Anniversary*, a collection featuring of all of the *Postal* titles along with the movie, launches.

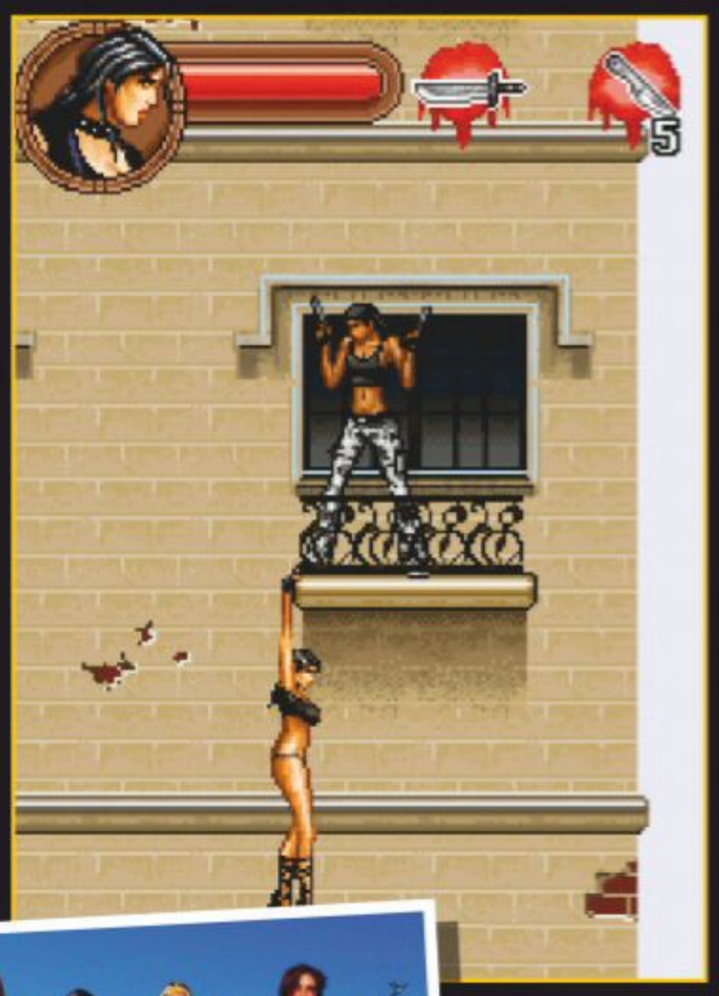
WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

VINCE DESI

■ Vince remains the CEO of Running With Scissors and he continues, along with his team of developers, to work on the *Postal* franchise with updates of the games. Vince loves to engage with *Postal* fans and see what they're getting up to: indeed, having made the original *Postal* code open source in 2016, he has seen the game unofficially ported to machines such as the Nintendo Switch (and since it needs the data files from the original game to run, it helps to generate extra sales).

GARY COLEMAN

■ Having made his appearance in both the game *Postal 2* and in the *Postal* movie, the former child actor's, madcap life continued on. He got married in 2007 to 22-year-old Shannon Price before divorcing the following year. One year after that, Gary filed for bankruptcy protection, having lost $200,000 on an arcade called the Gary Coleman Game Parlor in California. In 2010 he was arrested on an outstanding domestic assault warrant. Sadly, he had congenital kidney disease and he also underwent heart surgery in 2009, suffering seizures soon after. He died on 28 May 2010, aged just 42, after falling down the stairs at his home and suffering an epidural hematoma.



» The 'Postal Babes' featured in and out of the *Postal* games. Along with Gary Colemen, they appeared in promo material for *Postal 2* – tapping into the controversial nature of Running With Scissors' games.

"They loved and couldn't get enough of violence in any form as long as it came from a big publisher spreading a big budget advertising campaign, but I only had one Mastercard," says Vince. "As for the government and politicians, they were simply uninformed and clearly didn't value the First Amendment as I did. So my initial response was, 'Holy shit… what the fuck?' But it quickly became a case of survival and so I embraced their hate and professed *Postal* love every chance I had, to the press and, most important, our quickly growing fanbase."

The isometric shooter was taken to many fans' hearts, going down a storm at E3 1998. It got an expansion that year called *Special Delivery* with four new levels, new characters and voices. RWS also began working on a game called *Flesh And Wire* but it was cancelled by publisher Ripcord Entertainment.

"*Flesh And Wire* was a different concept: a sci-fi 3D game where you played a blob-like character and it was very funny, although that wasn't the intention," Vince says. "For me, though, RWS has always been self-funded, and it just made sense to put our money in what we believe strongest in and that's how the *Postal* legacy has been fed and grown." From that point on, Running With Scissors concentrated solely on the *Postal* franchise. "After many kids' games behind me, sticking with *Postal* was more like hitting puberty and breaking my virginity and just wanting more and more and more."

Following a Japanese version called *Super Postal* in 2000, RWS worked on *Postal 2* and released it in 2003 – the year The Black Eyed Peas used footage from the game in their single *Where Is The Love?*. *Postal 2* also saw the franchise move into fresh territory. "With the add-on *Apocalypse Weekend* for *Postal 2* [in 2005], we introduced non-human zombie-like characters," Vince explains. "I also wanted a big cast of characters and landscapes, weapons and especially dialogue."

» [PC] *Postal 2* didn't take itself as seriously as the original game and RWS switched the viewpoint from top-down isometric to first-person.

RWS made sure its over-the-top humour was loud, clear and everywhere in *Postal 2*. "Most important to me was reaching a wider audience, expanding the theme from insanity to comedy, to make it so you couldn't stop laughing when you're playing," Vince says. The game's notoriety earned it more free publicity (page 270 of Robert Ludlum's bestseller *The Bourne Betrayal* had a youngster saying he "already had some experience blowing people's heads off playing *Postal 2*"). It also had a few surprises: *Postal 2* saw the introduction of troubled American actor and comedian Gary Coleman who had shot to fame as Arnold Jackson in the NBC sitcom *Diff'rent Strokes*, helping sales of the series shoot to more than a million.

"We kept brainstorming things we could do," recalls Vince, who also struck a deal with Softwrap to make the games available for download, getting around bans in 13 countries. "One day a team member came to me and said it'd be cool if we could have Gary Coleman in the game. I laughed my ass off and then realised how brilliant an idea it was so I got on the phone and invited

"There I was in a cock suit, everyone was laughing, I loved it"
Vince Desi

THE DNA OF RUNNING WITH SCIS

POSTAL

■ A history of Running With Scissors is akin to a history of *Postal*, given that every game the company has released has been another component of this long-running franchise. RWS has managed to keep interest in the game alive by cultivating a strong fanbase while also remaining entirely independent. The series even saw its own movie release, courtesy of divisive director Uwe Boll.

VIOLENCE

■ The studio's games are known for their very specific flavour of violence, but Vince Desi says they also "showcase many elements of today's crazy world" and are heavy on satire and humour: "If we took a more serious dramatic approach, it wouldn't be funny. And we all know it's always funny until someone gets hurt – and then its absolutely friggin' hysterical."

» [PC] *Postal III* again brought a different perspective to RWS' long-running murder romp – this time adopting a third-person viewpoint.

him to Tucson to see what we were doing. From the moment we picked him up at the airport I knew it was going to be magical. His heart was a lot bigger than he was, and sure he was crazy, but who isn't?"

Around this time, Vince received an email from a fan saying Uwe Boll wanted to make a movie based on *Postal*. Uwe had created other game-based films including *House Of The Dead*, *Alone In The Dark* and *BloodRayne* – none of which had been well received. "I looked him up and saw his film rep was horrible but he was also a devout independent and anti-establishment character so it seemed like a good fit." Vince says.

Shot in and around Vancouver, Vince played himself and a giant pair of testicles – the character Krotchy from *Postal 2*. "There I was in a cock suit, everyone was laughing, I loved it," says Vince. "They gave me a script and I told them I'd improvise because I don't talk anything like the script. I even had a trailer with my name and star on the door, but I didn't even know till the second day."

Even so, he says mistakes were made – the film was overlong, the editing could have been stronger and poor marketing support meant the movie bombed, he tells us. More troublesome, however, was *Postal III* in 2011, developed by TrashMasters Studios in collaboration with Running With Scissors and published by Akella. It was so poorly received, RWS even went as far as pulling it from its own store the following year.

"*Postal III* started with us doing the script, music, design and character development and Akella's in-house talent programming and working on the art," Vince explains. 'It was going great the first year, then the economy tanked in Russia, and the shit hit the fan. Akella lost their primary development team, and over the next months we got down to just about the dishwasher doing the coding. I've always believed its important to distinguish between action and intent, and so knowing they had the best of intentions, but unfortunately the worse performance, the end result was a product that never should have been published."

» Not only did the *Postal* movie star director Uwe Boll (second from the right), it also included Vince Desi dressed as Krotchy (second from left, if you're not sure).

Making amends, RWS created an extension for *Postal 2* called *Paradise Lost* in 2015 and it revisited the original *Postal* in 2016 for Windows using the Unreal Engine 4 to celebrate its 20 anniversary. "We always loved the isometric, hand-drawn art style of *Postal* and wanted to recreate that art in high definition while taking the opportunity to modernise many things such as the controls and multiplayer component," Vince says.

As for the future, Vince is staying quiet for the time being. "Some time later this year we'll be making a major announcement about what we've been doing," he says. We're not sure what that could be, but we're certain it'll once again court controversy, and RWS wouldn't have it any other way. ✱

SORS

CONTROVERSY

■ Controversy goes hand-in-hand with violence but, in this case, it also relates to the often tasteless nature of Running With Scissors' output. The studio's games include Al-Qaeda terrorists, the ability to urinate on victims and coarse sexual references. US senator Joseph Lieberman one said, "The three worst things in American society are Marilyn Manson, Calvin Klein Underwear ads and the videogame *Postal*."

DEVOTED TEAM

■ As Vince Desi tells us, from the very beginning working at Running With Scissors has "always been like a club, with active and inactive members growing and shrinking from project to project". Funded by its own efforts, and with personal sacrifices made along the way, the tight team at RWS has certainly proven itself to be resilient throughout its 23-year-long history.

SELF-AWARENESS

■ As if to show just how intertwined *Postal* and Running With Scissors are, the developer included itself in *Postal 2*. Vince Desi appears, sacking the player before having them engage against an armed assault of protesting Parents For Decency campaigners. "Kill violent videogamers," they urge, the developers' unique humour shining through.

CLASSIC MOMENTS

Zombies Ate My Neighbors

» **PLATFORM:** MEGA DRIVE » **RELEASED:** 1993 » **DEVELOPER:** LUCASARTS

Who would have thought that in a game packed with zombies, mummies, aliens, chainsaw maniacs, killer dolls, werewolves and all kinds of other horrors, the scariest foe of all would be a human baby? Well, the star of Titanic Toddler, stage eight of LucasArts' cult classic shooter, is no ordinary infant. This towering tot is *huge*, and surprisingly nimble for its size. As well as having an enormous health pool that can take ages to whittle down if you're short on weapons, its attacks are no joke, either – it can squirt milk from its oversized bottle if you try to fight it at range, while its stomps can leave you flat as a pancake. Oh, and you might want to think about rescuing any survivors foolish enough to be out in the garden with this beastly baby pretty quickly, as they'll be flattened in an instant if it gets too close. The game's wacky humour was pretty evident before this level, but Titanic Toddler leaves no doubt about *Zombies*' ability to keep you on your toes by introducing increasingly weird and wonderful enemies over the course of its 50-plus levels.

BIO

Part-maze game, part-top-down shooter, all loving parody of B-movie culture. *Zombies Ate My Neighbors* (released simply as '*Zombies*' in Europe) is a fast-paced action game where your performance on each level directly affects the intensity of subsequent stages. Bold graphics, schlocky horror references and an entertaining co-op mode have made this a cult favourite of the era, just like the movies it so openly and frequently references.

MORE CLASSIC ZOMBIES ATE MY NEIGHBORS MOMENTS

Day Of The Tentacle

This bonus stage is a direct callback to LucasArts' point-and-click classic, replacing zombies with threatening purple tentacles. The catch? Well, you're in the lap of the RNG gods if you want to check this stage out – you need to get a lucky bazooka or monster potion pick-up in the opening level in order to smash the hedge wall in the top-left corner of the map.

Drink Me

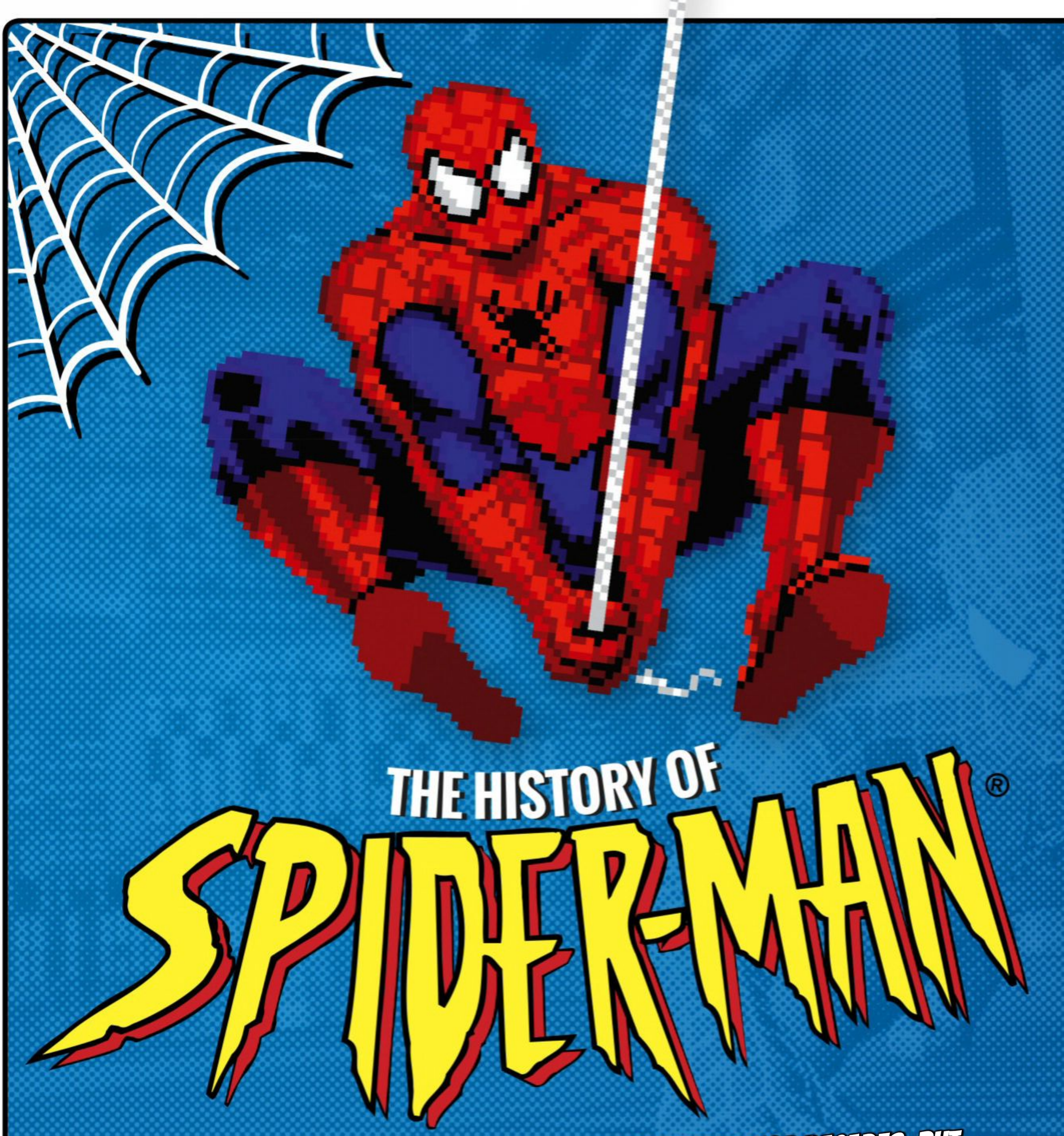
The potion is one of the riskier items in the game, as its effects are random. If you're fortunate, you might get all your health back or transform into a powerful monster for a short while, but there's a chance you may instead suffer some ill effects. By far the worst is the Mr Hyde transformation, stripping you of control of your character as the beast rushes at survivors.

Creature Feature

Just about every classic B-movie trope is referenced here, and each new enemy type that gets introduced changes things up in exciting and amusing ways. The monsters are all superbly animated, whether it's the lumbering chainsaw maniacs prowling the hedge mazes or the killer dolls that leap from their packaging in the toy store.

Hidden Treasures

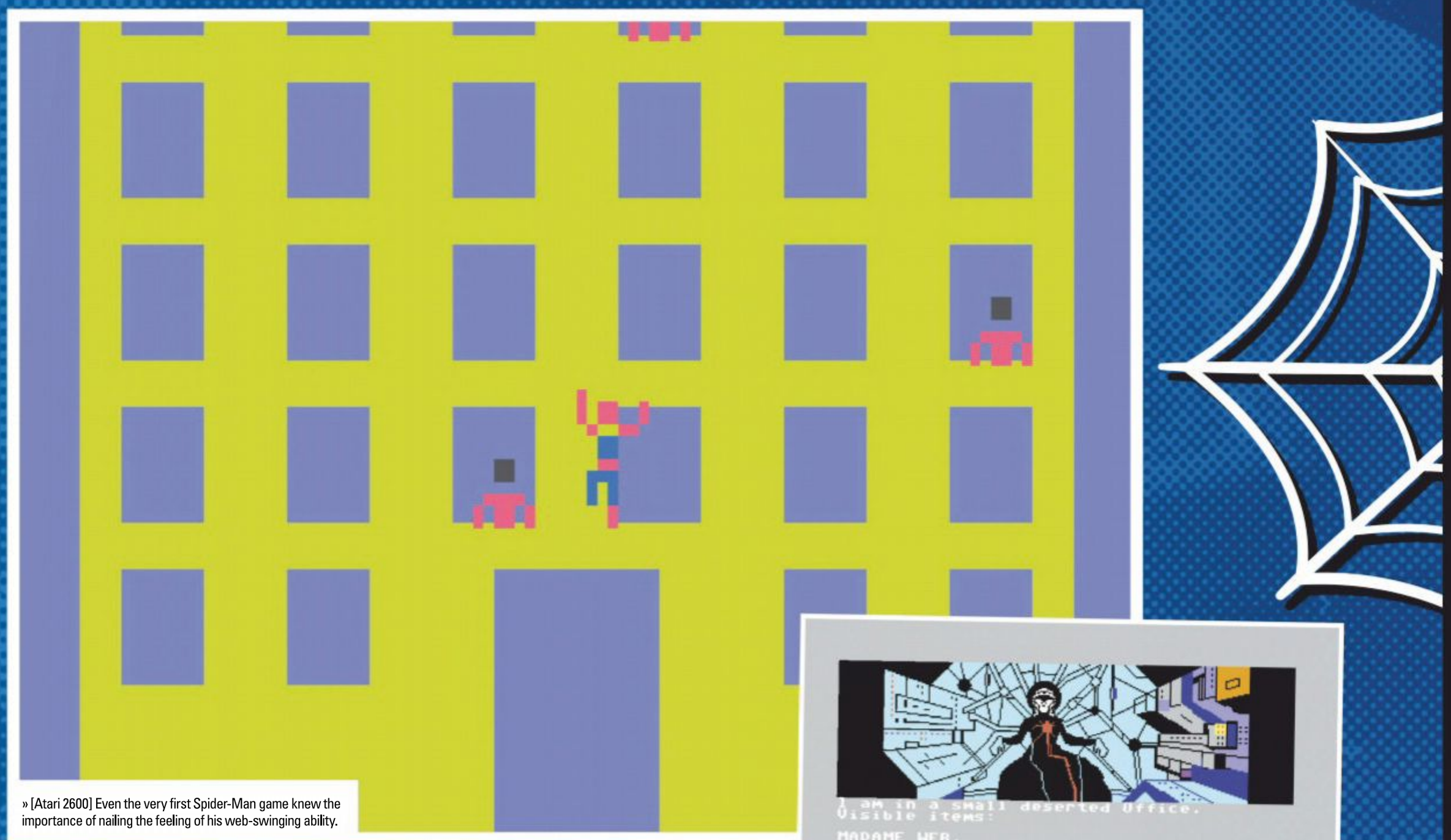
Every stage is loaded with secrets, ranging from shortcuts to reach civilians easily, to items that will help thin the hordes more efficiently. Each has its own access requirement – some can be unlocked with the water gun or simply by walking into them, while others need more powerful weapons or items in order to break through and claim your reward.



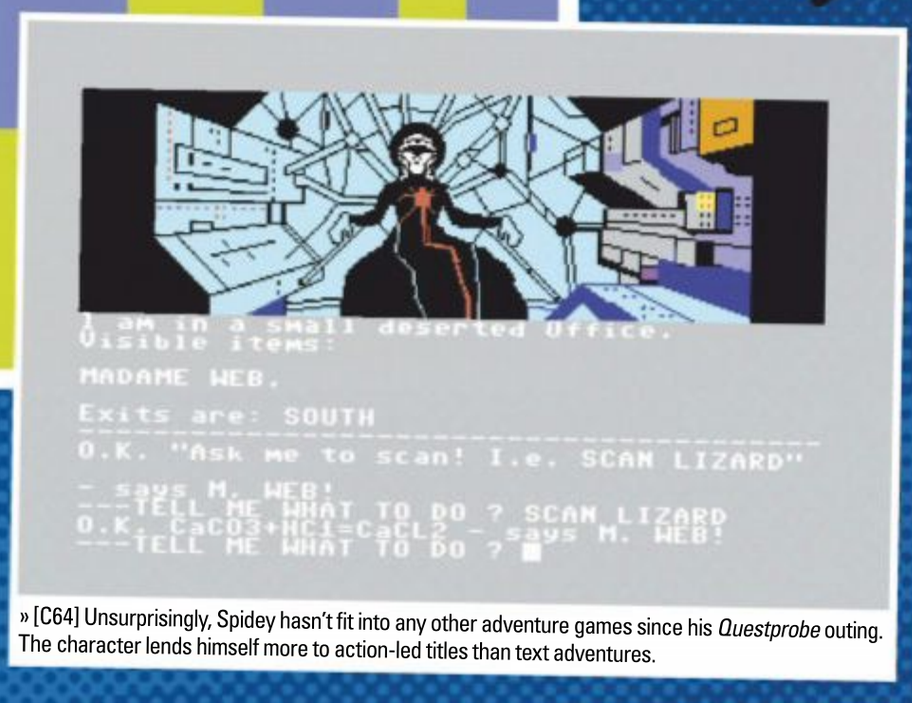
THE HISTORY OF SPIDER-MAN®

SPIDEY HAS BEEN A SIGNIFICANT PART OF VIDEOGAMES FOR DECADES, BUT WHAT HAS MADE SPIDER-MAN SUCH A STRONG FIT FOR GAMING, AND WHAT SETS HIM APART FROM OTHER SUPERHEROES?

Words by Adam Barnes



» [Atari 2600] Even the very first Spider-Man game knew the importance of nailing the feeling of his web-swinging ability.


I am in a small deserted office.
Visible items:
MADAME WEB.
Exits are: SOUTH
O.K. "Ask me to scan! I.e. SCAN LIZARD"
- says M. WEB!
---TELL ME WHAT TO DO ? SCAN LIZARD
O.K. CaCO3+HCl=CaCL2 - says M. WEB!
---TELL ME WHAT TO DO ?

» [C64] Unsurprisingly, Spidey hasn't fit into any other adventure games since his *Questprobe* outing. The character lends himself more to action-led titles than text adventures.

"THAT WAS THE HEART OF THE ENTIRE GAME GETTING THE WEB, THE ARC, THE SWING"

Laura Nikolich

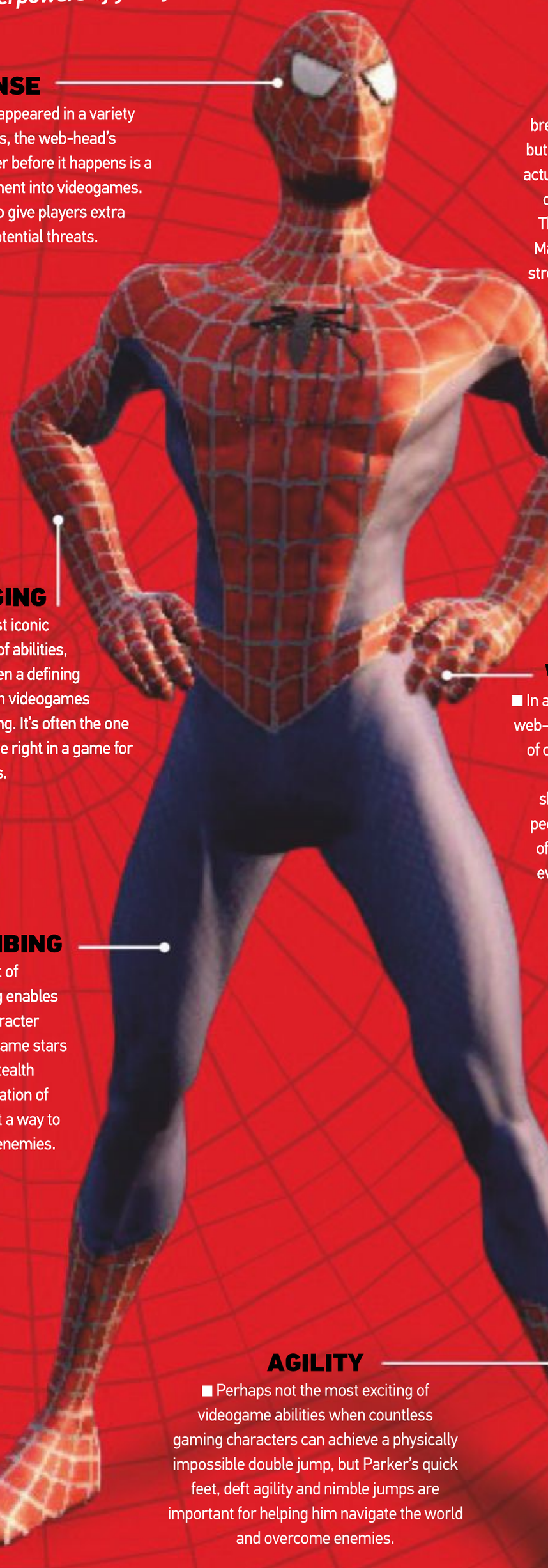
There's something about Peter Parker's alter ego that has made the web-slinger one of the most iconic characters in comic books, film, television, toys and, of course, videogames. And it's easy to argue that Spider-Man has had far greater success in gaming than any of his superhero stablemates. Aside from perhaps Batman, few comic book characters have had the same prevalence in videogames, fewer still have had the consistency.

Spidey's career starts towards the end of the Seventies, at which point the hero was a household name. With the ascent of gaming, Marvel was clearly on the hunt for a way to bring its hottest character over to the computer gaming market. Around the close of the Seventies Marvel had worked with Parker Brothers to create an electronic toy by the name of Rom The Spaceknight. Parker Brothers then moved into creating licensed videogames, leading to the first *Spider-Man* game. The task was handed to Laura Nikolich, a young programmer who had joined the growing games department of the company to develop the game for the Atari 2600. "Marvel sent me a bunch of comics and I read them and I looked at them," says Laura, who admits she hadn't had too much exposure to the character at that point. "The Green Goblin was a big deal, so we had the Green Goblin that was basically bothering Spider-Man a lot trying to cut his web while he was climbing the building to try and save it from a bomb. But that was about as fancy as you could get and still stay inside of 4K." The limitations of the hardware led to the vertical scrolling of the game, which still allowed for a sense of Spider-Man scaling a tall New York skyscraper, web-swinging his way to the top. "That was the heart of the entire game, getting the web, the arc, the swing," recalls Laura. "It was something called a DDA algorithm, and it was given to me [by] somebody who was a math genius. I just had to program it into the game." Whether she knew it or not, Laura was ultimately the pioneer of what would come to define Spidey and his videogames. The Atari 2600 game had everything that would go on to be staples of future *Spider-Man* games: the web-swinging, a compelling villain and the New York setting.

Releasing in 1982 on Atari 2600, *Spider-Man* remains one of the more memorable web-head games for its smooth swinging and ability to encapsulate the essence of the character. But Marvel was also interested in home computers and, in keeping with the particulars of the platform, chose to take its comic licences down a different route. "Joe Calamari of Marvel approached us," explains Scott Adams. "He was looking to get the Marvel brand into home computers and he talked to a number of folks: they all recommended Adventure International." Scott's company was a leader in adventure games on home computers and so Marvel felt it was the best choice to help it approach this particular avenue. More than anything, however, the comic book publisher set a precedent that

SPIDEY SENSE

The many superpowers of your friendly neighbourhood Spider-Man



SPIDER-SENSE

■ Though it's always appeared in a variety of forms and functions, the web-head's ability to detect danger before it happens is a perfect tool to implement into videogames. It creates an excuse to give players extra response times for potential threats.

SUPERHUMAN STRENGTH

■ Flying through the air at breakneck speeds is one thing, but it's for naught if Spidey can't actually take down the bad guys once he arrives on the scene. Though he's not the strongest Marvel superhero, he's got the strength and endurance to take on some pretty hefty foes.

WEB-SWINGING

■ As perhaps the most iconic of Spider-Man's slew of abilities, web-swinging has been a defining trait of the character in videogames from the very beginning. It's often the one aspect that needs to be right in a game for it to achieve greatness.

WEB-SHOOTING

■ In addition to swinging, Spidey's web-launchers allow for a myriad of combat capabilities: stringing someone up to stun them, shooting globs that can knock people back, dragging enemies off of ledges and rooftops, and even webbing up his hands for stronger fist-fighting.

WALL-CLIMBING

■ Another iconic trait of Spidey, wall-climbing enables something in the character that not many videogame stars can get. It provides stealth opportunities, exploration of 3D space or even just a way to launch attacks onto enemies.

AGILITY

■ Perhaps not the most exciting of videogame abilities when countless gaming characters can achieve a physically impossible double jump, but Parker's quick feet, deft agility and nimble jumps are important for helping him navigate the world and overcome enemies.

would become a fairly regular part of Marvel's involvement with the games industry. "I was given a prerelease copy of a series of comics that Marvel was about to publish," says Scott. "It was called *Marvel Universe* and it was an encyclopedia of all the Marvel characters ever created. I then asked for and got a subscription to every Marvel comic that was currently in print. I read these all faithfully as I started thinking about the series and what I wanted to do with it." The result was the *Questprobe* series, alongside which was a 12-part tie-in comic series that Marvel produced. Though the series began with The Hulk and would feature other heroes, Spider-Man came second since this way Scott felt he would "be able to do a better job on Spider-Man that way". This adventure game released in 1984 for Apple II, C64, ZX Spectrum and the Atari 8-bit, enhancing Adventure International's game engine to allow verb and noun combinations for greater variety to input.

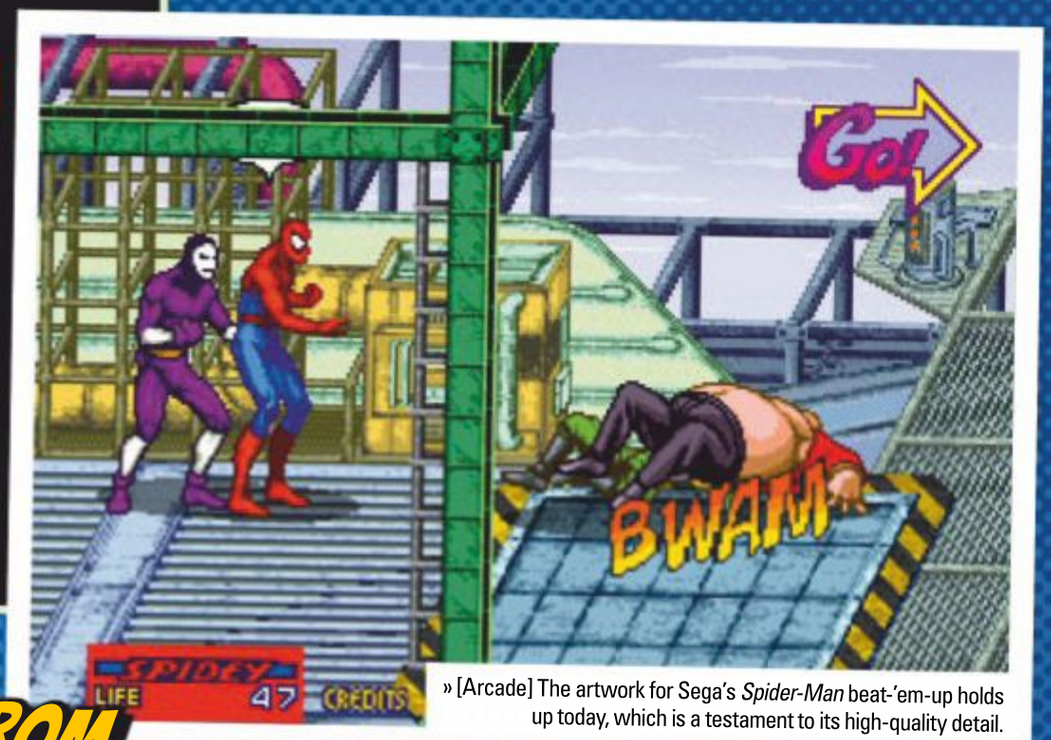
But the industry was suffering for much of the Eighties, with the interest in games waning and companies like Adventure International having to close up shop. This meant a hiatus for Spider-Man in videogames, with five years passing by before his next title was released, a generic side-scrolling beat-'em-up that matched the quality of visuals to be expected from a comic book franchise but had very little in the way of compelling gameplay. *The Amazing Spider-Man And Captain America In Dr Doom's Revenge!*, paired the two titular characters together for a pretty generic offering.

However, the NES and the Game Boy both released later in the Eighties, and with them came renewed passion for gaming platforms. Spider-Man would be a significant part of this, too, with numerous releases throughout the Nineties with varying degrees of success. The first of these was simply called *The Amazing Spider-Man* and was published in 1990 by Paragon for home computers, blending puzzles, platforming and combat together to properly use the character. It was the first of Spidey's games to leverage the wider variety of the character's skills. After being tasked with helping convert *Dr Doom's Revenge!* over to 8-bit platforms, Oxford Digital Enterprises was given *The Amazing Spider-Man*. "I'd already had an idea for a platform game, which had rooms with gravity in different directions, even though I'd never had a platform game published before," says Kevin Ayre, one of the developers at ODE. "When the opportunity for a *Spider-Man* game came along it seemed an obvious fit, and my boss was happy with the idea." As was the case with the first of the web-slinger's games, the character himself influenced much of the way the game should be played. "Once we'd decided on a platform game," adds Kevin, "walking on walls and swinging on webs seemed essential for *Spider-Man*. We also opted for stunning over killing enemies, from the few *Spider-Man* comics I'd read as a child, that seemed to fit his character."

Meanwhile, early on in its relationship with Nintendo, Rare produced the first of Spidey's

» [NES] Tying into the comic storyline of the Sinister Six, the NES game featured some of Spidey's most recognisable villains as bosses.

»[Game Boy] Though the initial handheld games were limited by the hardware, they still managed to leverage the character well.



» [Arcade] The artwork for Sega's *Spider-Man* beat-'em-up holds up today, which is a testament to its high-quality detail.

"WE OPTED FOR STUNNING OVER KILLING ENEMIES, FROM THE FEW SPIDER-MAN COMICS I'D READ AS A CHILD, THAT SEEMED TO FIT HIS CHARACTER" *Kevin Ayre*

handheld games for the Game Boy, also releasing in 1990. Though it was a side-scrolling beat-'em-up, it still featured web-swinging and wall-climbing. However, it expanded on the character by featuring numerous villains to deal with in boss fights, the first example of 'Spider-Sense' as warnings for incoming danger, and cutscenes that portray Peter Parker as the wise-cracker that he is. Much of this was true of 1990's third *Spidey* release, *Spider-Man Vs The Kingpin*, this time for Sega's Mega Drive and Master System consoles. Everything was much more slicker here, and it paid greater attention to New York as a setting than any other game prior, with moments in Parker's home, on the streets saving old ladies from purse-snatchers and on the rooftops of the famous city.

With the web-head dominating home platforms, Marvel wanted to get Spidey into arcades, and for that it worked with Sega to develop the coin-op *Spider-Man: The Video Game*. This beat-'em-up focused less on Spidey (Black Cat, Sub-Mariner, and Hawkeye also featured), and allowed up to four players to play cooperatively. There were two key traits that made this title stand out. The first was the artwork, which was some of the best a Marvel game had seen so far, and the second was the novel way it blended gameplay styles, with the camera zooming out for platforming and closing in for combat.

1992 saw Acclaim take control of the rights to produce Marvel games and like most of the franchises that the publisher was dealing with at the time, this meant a slew of *Spider-Man* games during the Nineties. When it came to Marvel, it helped that Acclaim's headquarters was located at Glen Cove in Long Island, not too far from Marvel's HQ in New York. "We'd visit the Marvel office in downtown Manhattan," explains Mark Flitman, one of the key people at Acclaim at the time. "We'd talk to them about upcoming storylines, they'd send me the comic books as they came out. So I would see what was out, I could hear what was coming." Marvel expanded on its interest in pairing games with the comic books it was releasing, and that in turn would guide the storylines of the games. "*Invasion Of The Spider-Slayers* was a short storyline," adds Mark, "*Maximum Carnage* I think was a 14-comic storyline."

» [Game Boy] *The Amazing Spider-Man* was a fun effort on Game Boy, but could be a little tricky at times.

[SNES] *Maximum Carnage* remains one of the most fondly remembered Spidey games because of its great animation, visuals, storyline and quality of gameplay.

[Game Boy Color] *Spider-Man And The Sinister Six* saw Spidey facing off against some of his most famous foes. This clown isn't one of them.

But before those two games rocked up came a trio of *Spidey* releases in 1992. The first was a sequel to Rare's Game Boy game, *The Amazing Spider-Man 2*, which added in the need to find items scattered throughout the stage. The game's developer, Bits Studios, also created the NES and Master System release of 1992's *Spider-Man: Return of The Sinister Six* – published outside of Acclaim by part-time Marvel partner Sega – which was based on the comic book storyline of the same name. It was Software Creations that handled the development of the third release of 1992, the SNES game *Spider-Man And The X-Men In Arcade's Revenge*. Here Spider-Man set out to rescue Wolverine, Storm, Cyclops and Gambit, allowing for a greater variety to both the stages and the gameplay of the title, since each of the five characters had their own dedicated stages.

Acclaim's involvement with Spidey continued for a few more years, resulting in a third Game Boy release in 1993 and a terrible SNES game based on the animated TV series in 1995. But Spider-Man hadn't really had a hit, he needed a title that stood out as a must-have regardless of the interest in the character. It wasn't until 1994 when *Spider-Man And Venom: Maximum Carnage* was able to change that, with Software Creations being given development responsibilities once again. "We went to Marvel HQ one day and they were telling us about this storyline coming up," explains Mark. "It just had a ton of enemies, a ton of heroes, a ton of antiheroes; it was perfect for a videogame." This time, however, rather than overcomplicating things with five different playable characters, the design was instead focused on just two: Spider-Man and his Symbiote nemesis Venom. "Because we were following the storyline," he adds, "I thought that having the comic book panels interspersed throughout the game but coming to life, having some movement to them, would be a cool idea so that people who were into that comic book story would actually see the panels with movement and then get to play like they're part of the story." The game was akin to *Streets Of Rage* and featured very little in the way of platforming, as the majority of *Spider-Man* games had in the past. Working closely with Marvel to ensure the look and feel of the game was spot-on, everything about the game was slickly produced. While it was popular, it was still criticised for its limitations, the basic combat and limited variety ultimately holding it back from greatness, and a sign that there should perhaps be more to Spidey's games than just fisticuffs. All the same, its success meant a sequel. *Separation Anxiety* was released a year later in 1995, a rehash of the previous game with the storyline altered. Though it looked worse, the same enemies and locations were used to string the story along. At this point Acclaim gave up on the web-slinger, and though it did experiment with other Marvel characters, it mostly focused on its other licences. However, the Nineties still had a pair of *Spider-Man* games left to squeeze out, the first being an impressive Japan-only title for the SNES by the name of *The Amazing Spider-Man: Lethal Foes*. Sega also worked with Marvel to produce a title for the Sega 32X. *The Amazing Spider-Man: Web Of Fire* had slick animation and design, but the limited interest in the platform meant it just didn't get the audience it deserved.

"I THOUGHT HAVING THE COMIC BOOK PANELS INTERSPERSED THROUGHOUT THE GAME WOULD BE A COOL IDEA"

Mark Flitman

Around this time Marvel Comics began to suffer financially and so fewer games were produced based on its licences. However, by the early Noughties, two key things had happened. First, Marvel begun pursuing film as an outlet for its licences, with the *X-Men* being the initial brand to make it to the silver screen and helping to lead the company into profitability. Second was the release of the PlayStation that turned things around for Spidey's videogames, and now that Activision had the licence there was money available to make something great. Releasing in 2000, Neversoft's *Spider-Man* was the first time the character could explore a 3D environment. Exterior levels allowed for the web-slinger to explore New York's rooftops, while interiors enabled stealth gameplay as Parker crawled about ceilings and through vents. It was a revelation, and well loved in spite of its early-3D limitations. A sequel – developed by Vicarious Visions – was released a year later with the subtitle of *Enter Electro*, which enhanced the exterior stages with limited ground-level stages.

Meanwhile a pair of portable games were released. *The Sinister Six* released in 2001 on the Game Boy Color and, only months later, another handheld game (*Mysterio's Menace*) appearing instead on Game Boy Advance. Then, in 2002, something major happened: Marvel and Sony released the live-action *Spider-Man* film, turning the comic book company's fortunes around. Marvel wanted to capitalise on this success, and a large part of that was to be with videogames. A movie tie-in was released and didn't set the world alight, but it did manage to tease things to come.

That's where *Spider-Man 2* comes in. The game is now notorious for being considered one of the best *Spider-Man* games of all time, and it all started with Treyarch wanting to match the weight and excitement of the *Spider-Man* film. "It was a huge effort," says Tomo Moriwaki, the creative director on the sequel. "We had about 25 people on the team at the beginning of *Spider-Man 2* and pretty much everybody was working on swing physics, swing visuals, controls and prototype environments. And that process lasted about six months." The popularity of open world games just made sense in Spidey's universe, and being able to explore New York however you wanted, stopping crimes and swinging around freely was a real revelation at a time when *GTAIII* was all anyone was focused on. "If you have a swing system like that," adds Tomo, "you have to go open world. Swinging around as Spider-Man was way better than driving that car in *GTA III*." The extra development time granted by the Activision execs meant that *Spider-Man 2* was given the time needed to make it the stand-out *Spidey* game it is. Even now it's considered one of the best *Spider-Man* games, and that's some 15 years after its release.

But as a result of this, a precedent was set and most of Peter Parker's games since have followed the template set by *Spider-Man 2*. From this point on there was another dizzying

THE HALL OF INFAMY

Key villains that Spidey has bested in battle

VENOM

■ Easily the most familiar villain in the *Spider-Man* comics, Venom has appeared in a number of games – not only as an enemy to defeat but he's also worked as an ally on occasion, too.

ELECTRO

■ Another commonly recurring villain, Electro has been a baddie to beat throughout the *Spider-Man* games. In some cases he's been the lead villain, in others he's been little more than a miniboss.

DR OCTOPUS

■ As the leader of the Sinister Six, Doc Ock has made it into the games a number of times alongside the five other members. He's also solely been the lead villain of a couple of games, too.

MYSTERIO

■ With his name in the title of a game – *Mysterio's Menace* – the dome-headed master of illusion has a spot among the rare few villains to take centre stage in a *Spider-Man* videogame release.

THE GOBLINS

■ Whether it's the Green Goblin, the Hobgoblin or the Demogoblin, these villains have made appearances in numerous Spidey games. Green Goblin has even been playable in one game.

SANDMAN

■ As one of the earliest *Spider-Man* villains, Sandman also happens to be one of the earliest videogame supervillains, too, having made an appearance in adventure games on DOS and Mac.

SCORPION

■ Old pointy-tail isn't exactly the most exciting foe for Spider-Man and he's never been a major antagonist in the games, either. He does pop up from time to time to cause trouble, however.

ARCADE

■ Another baddie that has been lucky enough to score his own subtitle (in *Spider-Man And The X-Men In Arcade's Revenge*). This supervillain likes to test heroes in his 'Murderworld' program.

LIZARD

■ Dr Curt Connors gets a good amount of appearances when it comes to *Spidey* games, but they're never all that significant. Despite his familiarity, he typically appears as a boss.

CARNAGE

■ While the Symbiote Carnage is similar in many ways to Venom, he's often seen as stronger, more powerful and a bigger risk. This is why Spidey and Venom team up in *Maximum Carnage*.

NEW YORK, NEW YORK!

How have games used the city that is as much a character of the comic books as Spidey himself?

STATUE OF LIBERTY

■ This is a secret level featured in *Maximum Carnage* and is actually only one of the few times the famous statue has featured directly as part of the *Spider-Man* games and their various missions.

THE TWIN TOWERS

■ The final battle of *Enter Electro* was supposed to take place on top of the World Trade Center, but as part of the emotional concerns surrounding the 9/11 attacks, it was altered at the last minute.

TIMES SQUARE

■ Tourists flock to Times Square daily but few Spidey games actually have moments set within the area itself. The battle with Demogoblin in *Maximum Carnage* is perhaps the most notable.

MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

■ A familiar sight in NY-based videogames due to its varied cultures and points of interest, the famous history museum makes an appearance in *Enter Electro*.

CENTRAL PARK

■ Understandably, NYC's popular park has been a regular setting for Spidey's rumbles, but it was first featured in *Spider-Man Vs The Kingpin*, which was also the first game to properly focus on storyline.

BROOKLYN BRIDGE

■ Few sights are as iconic as the NYC's very own Brooklyn Bridge, so much so that it is immediately recognisable even in the crude, blocky, PlayStation graphics of *Spider-Man 2: Enter Electro*.

FLATIRON BUILDING

■ The unique shape of this iconic New York building is an easy one to spot, even when web-swinging through the air at 80mph. In the PS2 game *Spider-Man 2*, this building has been co-opted by the Daily Bugle.

CHRYSLER BUILDING

■ A familiar landmark in the New York City skyline. A midair battle against Vulture in the 2002 *Spider-Man* game makes it especially memorable in videogames, too.

QUEENSBORO BRIDGE

■ The Queensboro Bridge in *Ultimate Spider-Man* is particularly noteworthy since it allows for access to a small part of Queens to explore – the only Spidey game to do so.

CONEY ISLAND

■ While not in Manhattan, Coney Island is still as recognisable a New York landmark as any other. In the Game Boy Color game *Sinister Six*, Spider-Man is lured there to rescue Aunt May.

» [PS4] The PS4's *Spider-Man* game has arguably taken the crown from *Spider-Man 2* as the greatest web-slinging game you can play right now.

string of web-head games, one released each year until 2014. Some directly tied into the movies as and when they released, while others offered interesting spins on the character or storylines. Treyarch enhanced its swinging and engine in 2005 with *Ultimate Spider-Man*, a game that featured novel panel-based cutscenes and a younger, more comic Parker as the main character. Enhancements were made to the web-swinging, too, this time requiring the player to swing from left to right to properly maintain speed. We'll also briefly mention 2006's *Spider-Man: Battle For New York*, as it's one of the few Spider-Man games to actually pull a lot of screen time away from the red-suited superhero. In 2007 there was *Spider-Man: Friend Or Foe*, which twisted the storylines of the movies to allow for heroes and villains to team up, while another movie tie-in was released with *Spider-Man 3* for various systems. But the team that had worked on *Spider-Man 2* had largely left at this point, however, and so it just didn't manage to match that same thrill of its gameplay.

With Treyarch's *Spider-Man* team in decline, a pairing with Shaba Games meant 2008's *Web Of Shadows* could get finished – and ultimately it was little more than a passable Spidey experience. Then, as part of the early mobile gaming craze that was happening, 2009 saw the release of *Toxic City* developed by Gameloft for Blackberry and Windows Phones. 2010 was Beenox's debut *Spider-Man* game with *Shattered Dimensions*, a game that might not have matched the classic Spidey experience but added a greater focus on action that matched well with the character. Beenox was then put to work on a sequel, *Edge Of Time*, for 2011 and a movie tie-in only a year later with *The Amazing Spider-Man*. The web-head's gaming quality was in decline as a result, the short turnaround limiting Beenox's ability and even resulting in a poorly received *Amazing Spider-Man* sequel in 2013. Spidey was at a low, with only a pair of mobile games in 2013 to offer anything worthwhile for the character.

That is, until 2018. Last year saw Insomniac Games, of *Ratchet & Clank* fame, release a PlayStation 4-exclusive powerhouse of a *Spidey* game that returned to the emphasis on fantastic web-swinging, a slew of interesting villains and the right balance of open world gaming and intense action that fits Spider-Man so well. Many are even claiming it's the best *Spider-Man* game of all time, knocking *Spider-Man 2* off the throne. However, Parker's days as a videogame character are far from over, and if Insomniac is to work on a sequel then it could ultimately lead to a golden age for the superhero. "Spider-Man as a videogame character? He's just perfect," says Mark. "He's got everything you would want. He's got humour, he's got unbelievable movement, he's got this webbing – this one ability that has so many built-in features. You can tie in a nice story to his hidden identity, he's got great enemies. You can't ask for a better gaming character than your friendly neighbourhood Spider-Man."

SPIDEY SPIN-OFFS

Other games that Spider-Man has made an appearance in

LEGO MARVEL SUPER HEROES

■ Naturally *Spider-Man* plays a significant part of the fantastic Lego game *Marvel Super Heroes*. He's important enough to have entire levels dedicated to his storylines and characters, while his unique abilities also mean he's one of the handful of characters you'll be using at the end to collect those gold bricks.

MARVEL VS CAPCOM

■ When this crossover happened, it's not surprising that our favourite web-slinger was included in the roster. Marvel has countless characters to pick from to battle Ryu and friends, but there is no way that Spidey would be excluded. He likely will feature in any future similar crossover titles, too.

TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 2

■ Since Neversoft worked on both the *Tony Hawk*'s games and the *Spider-Man* PlayStation game, there was already a connection. Both games also used the same engine, so Neversoft chose to include the web-head as an unlockable character. He even has his own webby skateboard tricks.

MARVEL ULTIMATE ALLIANCE

■ By bringing many of the most popular Marvel characters together in a top-down beat-'em-up, Activision had stumbled onto a sort of comic book nerd nirvana. *Ultimate Alliance* is co-op and features over 140 playable Marvel characters, meaning anyone can play as their favourite hero (or villain).

MARVEL PUZZLE QUEST

■ If there's one law of mobile gaming, it's that any popular franchise has a match-three puzzle game based on it. *Marvel Puzzle Quest* is a surprisingly robust version of this, though, again allowing Spider-Man – among others – to be equipped as you level up, take on enemies and unlock new characters.

MARVEL HEROES

■ This defunct ill-fated online game suffered by not successfully drawing in a crowd, and not for any real fault of its developer Gazillion Entertainment. All the same, Spider-Man was made available very early on, likely to help draw in interest from players mostly excited to play as the iconic hero.

Nintendo DS Fact

■ Contrary to popular belief, 'DS' does not stand for 'dual screen' – Nintendo stated that the intended meaning was 'developers' system', due to the new potential its twin screens offered to game creators.

PROCESSOR: ARM946E-S (67MHZ), ARM7TDMI (33MHZ)

RAM: 4MB

GRAPHICS: TWO THREE-INCH LCD SCREENS (256X192), 18-BIT COLOUR DEPTH

AUDIO: 16-CHANNEL PCM8/PCM16/IMA-ADPCM, BUILT-IN STEREO SPEAKERS, HEADPHONE JACK

MEDIA: CARTRIDGE (TWO SLOTS – PROPRIETARY DS CARTS AND GAME BOY ADVANCE CARTS)

MEDIA: CASSETTE, OPTIONAL 5.25-INCH FLOPPY DISK INTERFACE, OPTIONAL HARD DISK INTERFACE

Nintendo DS

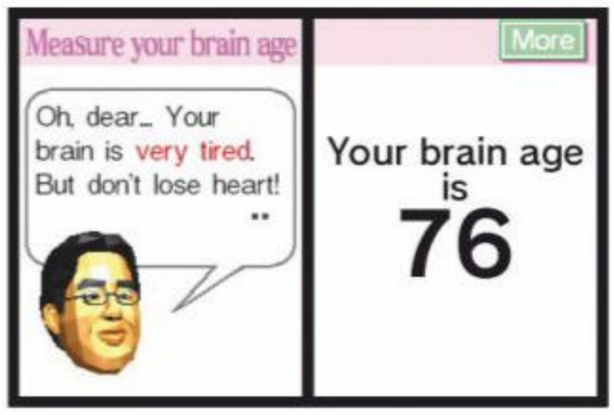
» **MANUFACTURER:** Nintendo » **YEAR:** 2004 » **COST:** £99.99/$149.99 (launch), (£20+ today)

Having been the dominant force in the handheld sector for over two decades, Nintendo finally started to feel the squeeze around the turn of the millennium as the explosive rise of mobile gaming transformed portable gaming. Mobile games were simple, cheap and accessible, with basic touchscreen interfaces letting anyone grab a quick gaming session on the go via a device they already carried with them everywhere. So in 2005, Nintendo returned fire at this unlikely opponent with a new handheld console that delivered the best of both worlds – classic button layouts and support for traditional gaming experience, but with the potential to tap into this new casual audience thanks to its optional stylus control on the lower of its two screens.

While its launch window was plagued with slews of shallow gimmick releases to show off the possibilities of touchscreen control, it wasn't long before developers had started to take a leaf out of Nintendo's own book and came out with inventive new games that brought together the traditional and the new to great effect. Wireless capabilities allowed select games to be taken online, but it was the influx of new players brought in by a library of simple touchscreen-focused releases that shot the DS to meteoric popularity – this new audience drove sales up to over 150 million, making the DS the most successful handheld of all time.

EDITOR'S CHOICE

Dr Kawashima's Brain Training: How Old Is Your Brain?



We're not going to pretend that this novelty slice of pseudoscience is the DS' best game, but it's hands-down one of the platform's most important releases. Between the handheld's low cost and touch-based interface, and the game's reliance on simple puzzles and tests, the barrier for entry to gaming was lowered to allow a whole new generation of (typically older) players to pick up and enjoy a Nintendo console. Marketing material frequently went after this demographic following the game's success, and much of the DS' own success is down to accessible titles like this bringing in a new audience.

WarGroove

CHUCKLEFISH COMMANDER FINN BRICE TAKES US BEHIND THE BATTLEGROUNDS OF THIS MODERN PIXEL-PERFECT, TURN-BASED STRATEGY HIT

Words by Drew Sleep

To say London-based publisher and developer Chucklefish has a style is an understatement. *Pocket Rumble* looks like it could've been a one-on-one fighter ripped straight from the Neo-Geo Pocket Color's library; *Timespinner* is a dead ringer for classic Igavania games; *Stardew Valley* – a runaway success which Chucklefish originally published – wears its *Harvest Moon* inspirations on its sleeve. No, Chucklefish has a *speciality*.

The studio is known for its distinctive pixel art games that, at a glance, draw inspiration from fondly remembered sprite-filled classics from the 16-bit and 32-bit eras. That's not to say that the team wishes to draw you in on nostalgia and call it a day, though. "As gaming transitioned from 2D to 3D, the genres kind of switched gear and a lot of the prevalent genres back in the day didn't go through that extended period of evolution [they have today]," says studio founder and *Wargroove* director Finn Brice. "It's not like those games reached their peak and there was nowhere else to take them, it was more that the switch from 2D to 3D meant that maybe there was other things, newer things, more exciting things, to explore and those [2D-focused things] got left behind."

Chucklefish is keen to evolve as much as rekindle childhood experiences, and that idea is one which runs through indie gaming as a whole – you can see innovation as much as evocation in

IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** CHUCKLEFISH
» **DEVELOPER:** CHUCKLEFISH
» **RELEASED:** 2019
» **PLATFORM:** PC, XBOX, SWITCH
» **GENRE:** TURN-BASED STRATEGY

» [PC] Our cavalry here can't do a lot against Valder's dragon, so they're more or less toast. Sorry guys!

"THE ADVANCE WARS-STYLE FORMULA GOT LEFT BEHIND COMPLETELY"

Finn Brice

modern indie greats such as *Super Meat Boy*, *Undertale* and *The Witness*. And this was something Chucklefish wanted to explore when it was ready to develop a new game in-house. "Whenever we have room for a new game [...] everyone is able to put forward a presentation or materials, or say their idea out loud, and bring it to this session where we pitch all kinds of games to each other," Finn explains. "Just before that time, we were talking about old-school strategy games, and particularly the fact that we loved *Final Fantasy Tactics* and *Disgaea*, *Tactics Ogre*, I could go on. Most of those games have a more modern version – with *Disgaea*, one just came out – or they have something that's doing the same thing, but it's more modern. But the *Advance Wars*-style formula got left behind completely, which was strange because across the company it was one of our favourite strategy games."

To Chucklefish, leveraging the feel of Intelligent Systems' dormant GBA turn-based strategy series was a no-brainer. "I think when you say to someone, 'Hey, this is like those games you played ages ago, and you haven't been able to play since, but it's got all of this extra stuff, I think that's a really exciting prospect. So it made sense," Finn enthuses. Chucklefish didn't want to make a carbon copy, though. Something that Finn makes clear throughout our interview is that he's always looking to bring a modern approach to old favourites. *Wargroove* features heroes on the field of battle, for example, each with their own unique 'Groove' ability which is something that Finn tells us is actually inspired by hero shooters like *Overwatch*. "We're trying to find the modern angle on these things, and at the moment I think people really are attaching themselves to games that have hero characters – I think that's very appealing in a modern market," he says.

***Wargroove* was supposed to be a small project, but it soon snowballed into something large-scale.** "We put a prototype together really quickly, we were playing it a lot against each other and having a lot of fun" Finn remembers. "But then the community side of it started to ramp up and people really started to get excited by it, and we said, 'Okay we really need to actually make this a proper full-size project.'" Finn is referring to the reception of *Wargroove's* announcement; its debut trailer in February 2017 soon racked up hundreds of thousands of views, and the game received a steady wave of previews throughout its development. The gaming world had a strong appetite for Chucklefish's brand of warfare.

» [PC] Capture enough buildings and you will be able to afford more powerful units.

DOGS OF WAR

Wargroove has its fair share of canine connections

It's clear the team behind *Wargroove* has an affinity for man's best friend. Initially, when the team was experimenting with different visual themes, the team mocked up a version of the game where each unit was either a cat or a dog (see the picture above). Dogs did make it into the final version of the game, as a unit type that acts as a scout, and they come in four different flavours – Battlepup, Dreadhound, Shiba Inu and Quagmutt, each based on which nation your Commander character is from. And then, of course there's Caesar, the majestic canine commander, who is somewhat based on Chucklefish's own office dog, called Iorek. "He doesn't look exactly the same, he's not white for one," Finn tells us, "but they both have the same sort of big, majestic thing going on."

» [PC] If you position your spearmen next to each other, they are guaranteed to perform a critical attack.

CHAIN OF COMMAND

Wargroove's cast of commanders are an eclectic bunch

MERCIA

■ The well-meaning and energetic leader of the Cherrystone nation, and the campaign's protagonist.

EMERIC

■ A scholar and a gentleman, Emeric is the brains behind Mercia's brawn. He's well taught in the arcane arts.

» [PC] Some missions will charge you to escort vulnerable villagers to safety.

CAESAR

■ The best of boys, oh yes he is. This majestic beast is Mercia's pet and best friend – he's an inspiring leader, too.

GREENFINGER

■ The leader of the Florian tribe. He fights using a makeshift hobby horse-like contraption and can cause vines to grow over the field.

NURU

■ An upbeat Florian that follows Mercia on her quest. Nuru first appeared in Chucklefish's first developed game, *Starbound*.

SEDGE

■ The sneaky scourge of the forest, Sedge is a thorn in the side of our heroes. He can wipe out weakened units in one strike.

TENRI

■ The empress of Heavensong. Tenri can conjure a fierce wind to blow her enemies away, provided they're not a commander unit.

KOJI

■ Another recruit on Mercia's adventure. This tiny tinkerer fights atop his creation, Tenko, and can create flying bombs.

RYOTA

■ This guy has blades for legs. *Actual blades for legs*. Naturally, he's a gifted kicker, as well as a loyal and trusted vassal to Tenri.

VALDER

■ The ruler of Felheim. Valder can raise the dead, and is reluctantly dragged into a war thanks to Sigrid's impulsive actions.

RAGNA

■ Ragna shouts, *a lot*. That said, she's only out for a fair fight and is more a victim of circumstance than a evildoer.

SIGRID

■ A vampiric kingslayer and instigator of war, Sigrid is an unpleasant adversary and always acts in her own self-interest.

It's fair to say something that won over the attention of many early fans was the game's visual style, specifically its detailed pixel art. "We tried a lot of different things, but this particular kind of style I think it would be fair to credit it to one of our artists, Lu Nascimento, who is a phenomenal pixel artist – honestly perhaps one of the best pixel artists in the world right now – and this is kind of *her* style which we all felt worked right away and that we loved," Finn says. The likes of *Advance Wars* was used as a reference, naturally, however Finn is keen to mention it's not the only inspiration behind *Wargroove*'s look. "Obviously, *Advance Wars* was a reference, but also – perhaps this is a game not many people have heard of, it's on the Sega Saturn – a game called *Dragon Force*, which I'm a huge fan of. We kind of felt that had the right level of depth of information for the pixel art, and it looked a bit more modern."

Balancing was an important part of *Wargroove*'s development. Devising an army of different distinct unit types and adjusting their health, movement and damage potential is far from easy, and Chucklefish was relatively green when it came to strategy games, so the team was throwing itself in the deep end. "The initial balance was through a huge amount of playtesting in PVP, and took quite a few months of work, and then it's been smaller tweaks from then on out," explains Finn. "It was a really interesting one for me, I play a lot of competitive games, I'm probably 50/50 competitive games and single-player retro stuff, so I have some idea of what goes into balancing a competitive game, but it was definitely one

"THE INITIAL BALANCE WAS THROUGH A HUGE AMOUNT OF PLAYTESTING IN PVP"

Finn Brice

of those things where we were thinking, 'We're making our best effort here but the community is probably going to break it the second they get their hands on it.'" Still, it worked out when it came to the final product… well, almost: one character's Groove ability proved to be a little *too* strong. "I don't think anything was incredibly broken, with the exception of Nuru's Groove. To our credit, myself and a couple of others were saying before release, 'Nuru's Groove is *really* broken,'" Finn laughs. The Groove in question, Teleport Beam, allows the commander to zap in a new unit right next to her, providing you pony up the gold it costs to recruit them. It lets you drop in powerful units like Goliaths right onto the frontline without them having to wander their way in from the barracks. Finn wasn't too worried about this, though. "We did tone down Nuru's Groove in the end in a patch because it was *so* powerful," he says. "The reason it made it into release, with us being aware it was perhaps a bit better than other Grooves in the game, was because one of the ways we approached balance in this game was we did it from the perspective of not necessarily attempting to create a game where every character is equally as powerful, because I don't think that's the best way to balance a game. I think you need to balance a game to be fun."

In true strategy game tradition, *Wargroove* also has a map editor, but in keeping with the theme of evolution Chucklefish also threw tools that users can use to create their own missions, and even cutscenes – something Finn cites *LittleBigPlanet* as being reference point for. "One of the programmers is a massive *StarCraft* fan," Finn explains, "and the *StarCraft* map editor has incredible tools which evolved into different game types. And because *Warcraft III* took those tools forwards and ended up evolving into *Dota* and stuff like that, we saw the value in that, basically." It's a smart move, turning the game into a platform of creation for the community that rallied behind the game from the beginning, but Chucklefish isn't banking on having the community, and the community alone, keep the game alive – Finn tells us the team has a hoard of content planned to keep *Wargroove* supported for the foreseeable future.

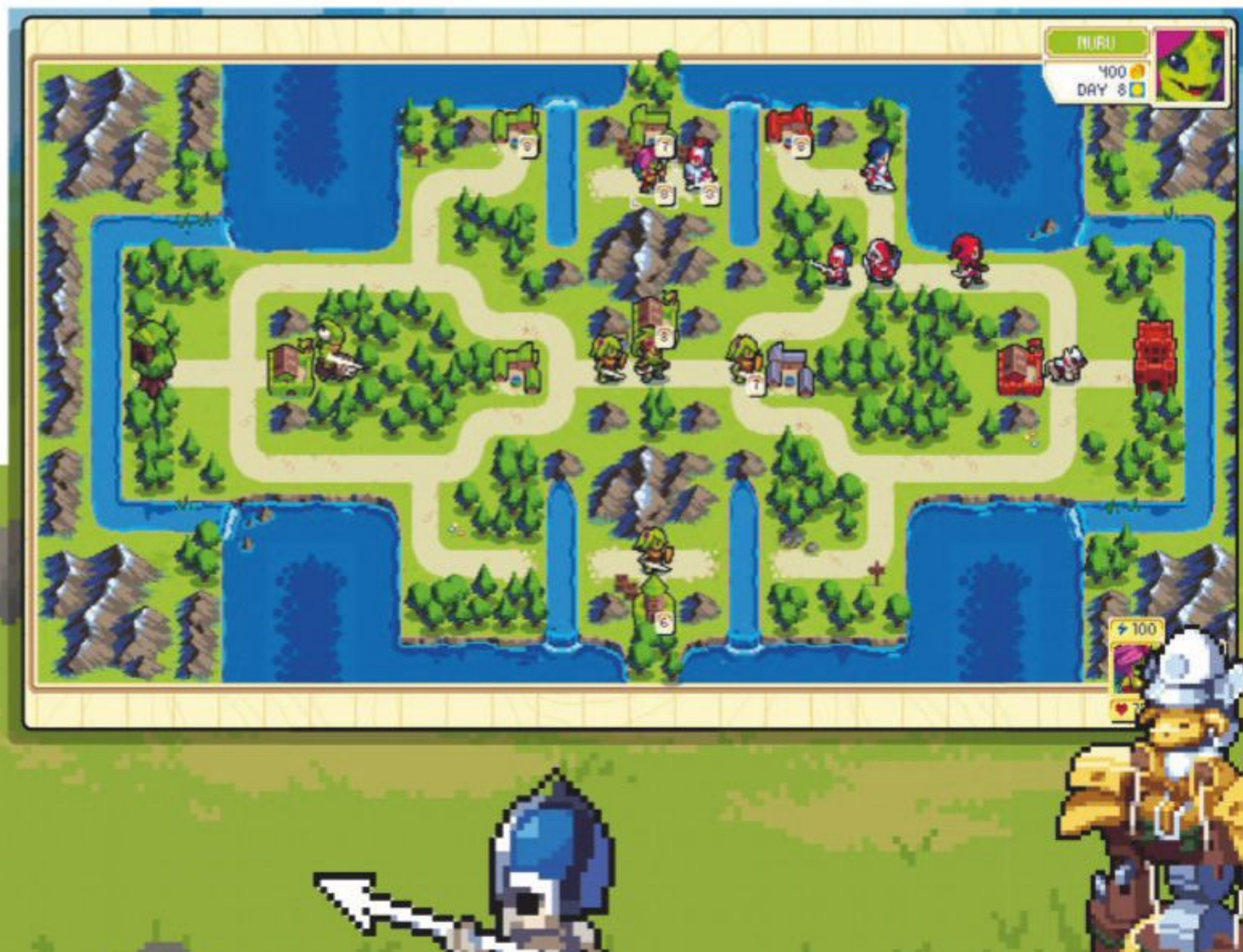
» [PC] You need to send your ground troops out to capture a tower in order to recruit air units.

After an extended development period, *Wargroove* launched on 1 February 2019 to a warm reception. It currently holds a score of 84 on Metacritic, with praise directed at its accessibility, and evolution of the *Advance Wars* formula. A couple of tepid thoughts came in from the likes of *Edge* and *The Telegraph*, which awarded the game 6/10 and three stars respectively, criticising the game for "not settling into its own groove" and "being rough around the edges".

» [PC] *Wargroove*'s sprite art, animation and attention to detail is excellent. Battle screens in particular are where they shine.

Finn is proud of Chucklefish's work on *Wargroove*, and when we ask what specifically he likes the most about the game, the developer struggles to distil his enthusiasm down to one specific feature. "One half of me wants to say the editing tools for the reasons we just spoke about," he begins, "but I don't want to give that answer again, so I guess maybe, maybe, the addition of the hero characters. I'm proud of the way they fit so nicely into the game, and also they inherently make big changes to the way you approach the game and the way the game feels."

We finish our interview by asking Finn, as a massive fan of retro games from a very young age, has he created a game that his younger self would have been satisfied with? "I absolutely would have enjoyed *Wargoove*, I know that much, he smiles, "because I was a huge fan of those kinds of games back in the day."



Astal

BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU WISH FOR

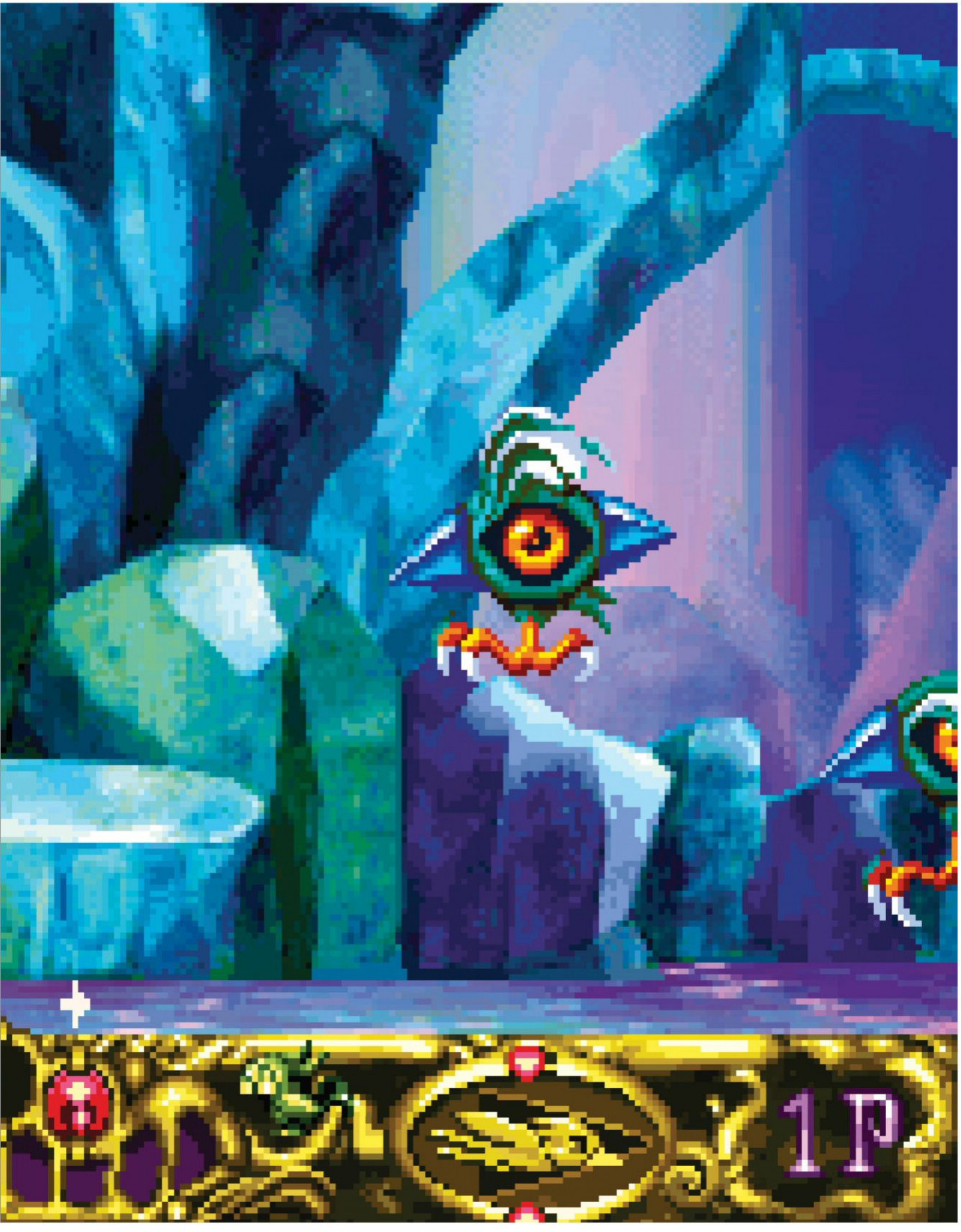
» SATURN » 1995 » SEGA

I've always wanted to own *Astal*. The opportunity first arose about 15 years ago after I picked up a 'This Is Cool' Saturn with 28 shoot-'em-ups for £500, but something stopped me from purchasing it. Fast forward to this year's London Gaming Market and I was finally able to pick up a copy at a very reasonable price. It turns out that *Astal* is a very surprising game, but not always for the right reasons.

The biggest surprise I had upon *Astal* loading up was discovering that it's actually developed by Sega. I had no idea this was the case, which surprised me somewhat because the main character is so ugly. There's nothing in Astal's dour design to suggest he comes from the same publisher that released the likes of Sonic, NiGHTS or Ristar, and his abilities are pretty generic, too. He's able to carry heavy objects like trees, punch the ground to stun enemies, throw objects and enemies over his broad shoulders and even blow on things. That's right, blow on things.

Another surprise was discovering just how bland *Astal*'s levels are. Many of the stages require you to do little more than amble through them and while a few do mix things up a little with tumbling platforms and dangerous lava gouts, you'll quickly become frustrated by *Astal*'s clunky controls, which are a little too imprecise and floaty. Again, surprising for a Sega platformer.

While *Astal* is far from perfect, there are some aspects of it that I do enjoy. The soundtrack is beautiful, perfectly matching each stage's environment, while boss fights are excellent and truly inventive in their structure and design. And then there's Astal's friend, a delightful little bird that can search for fruit to restore your health or even battle for you. Look past Astal's stunning visuals, however, and there's very little substance to Sega's game. I completed it shortly after purchasing it and now it's been sold to fund a new addition to my collection. I've always wanted to own *Astra Superstars*. I wonder if that's worth getting?


1P

>> We loved Sonic & All-Stars Racing Transformed, but will the follow-up be just as good? We also put Konami's latest compilation through its paces, do some dangerous driving and play the latest Puyo Puyo game. Enjoy!

» [PS4] We scored a hit with this cool weapon, which sets your treadmarks ablaze.

Team Sonic Racing

DOES TEAMWORK MAKE THE DREAM WORK?

INFORMATION

- **FEATURED SYSTEM:** PS4
- **ALSO ON:** XBOX ONE, SWITCH, PC
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PRICE:** £34.99
- **DEVELOPER:** SEGA
- **PUBLISHER:** SUMO DIGITAL
- **PLAYERS:** 1-4

We won't lie, we were disappointed when we found out that Sumo's latest Sega racing project would focus exclusively on *Sonic* and regular karting, dropping the aircraft, boats and Sega characters of *Sonic & All-Stars Racing Transformed*. Of course, Sega has gone to great pains to explain that *Team Sonic Racing* definitely *isn't* a sequel to the *All-Stars Racing* games, and is in fact very different. So if we focus on what the game *is* instead of what it isn't, do we still find something worth playing?

Firstly, it's worth pointing out that Sega's claims don't ring true – this *is* very much a sequel to the *All-Stars Racing* games, and if you've played either of Sumo's previous *Sonic* racers, you'll be right at home here. That's not a bad thing at all, as the great handling, wonderful drifting model and stunt boost system have all been brought over, providing an excellent base for the new team racing. Instead of racing for individual glory, racers compete in teams of three, with each racer in the team belonging to one of three classes – speed, technique or power – with unique attributes. For example, as a power type, Knuckles can smash through obstacles without losing speed, while technique racers can take shortcuts across rough terrain.

You can boost off the highest-placed racer in your team by following in their slipstream, or give any teammate a boost by skimming past them. Teammates can assist one another by passing collected items between them, and this is elegantly handled – sending, requesting and accepting items is all handled on one button. This is well worth doing as some items are powered up when received from another racer, and just like with the speed boosts, it builds up your Team Ultimate. When activated, this gives all members of your team invincibility and a speed boost. Race results are based on the whole team's standings, and it's possible to win without any member of your team taking first place.

The team system definitely adds something meaningful to the racing,

» [PS4] Over 40 per cent of the 21 tracks return from previous games, but they do benefit from nice makeovers.

BRIEF HISTORY

» Sonic's relationship with vehicles goes back a long way. He made his first ever videogame appearance (as an air freshener) in *Rad Mobile*, then eventually starred in two average kart racing games for Sega's Game Gear. After a brief spell racing on foot with *Sonic R* he then got back into the driving seat for *Sonic & Sega All-Stars Racing*, which arrived in 2010. Sumo outdid itself with the excellent sequel, *Sonic & All-Stars Racing Transformed*, which brings us neatly to Sonic's latest racing game. Phew!

✱ PICKS OF THE MONTH

DARRAN

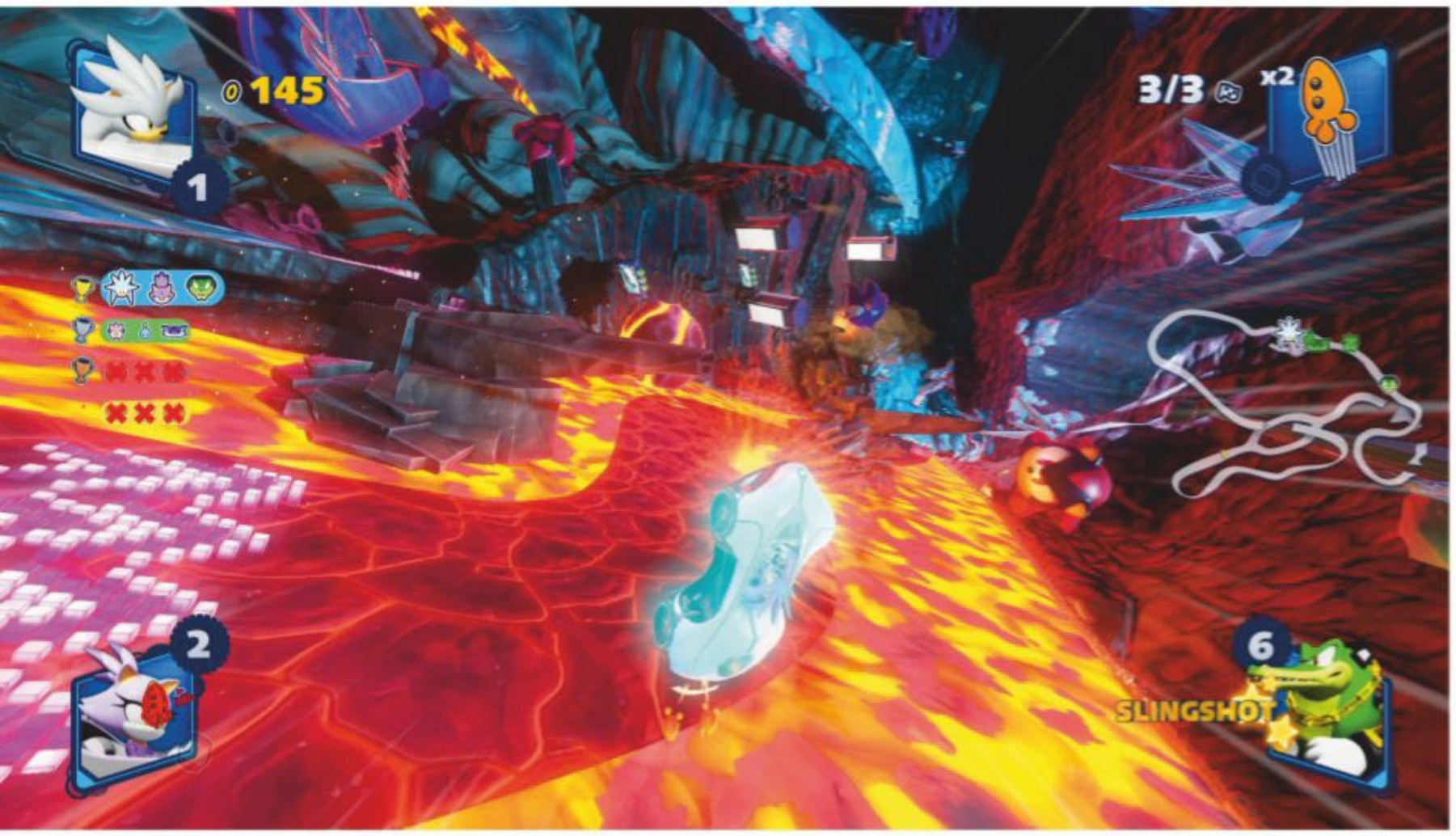
Castlevania Anniversary Collection

It's not perfect, but this remains a great collection of classics you can really sink your teeth into.

DREW

Dangerous Driving

Following our *Burnout* blowout last issue I was inspired to give this a go, and it's great. Kudos to the Three Fields team!.



» [PS4] Silver flips out, as he comes off a jump in this volcanic hellscape.

WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD

MARIO KART 64 (N64)

▼ SOMETHING NEW

SONIC & ALL-STARS RACING TRANSFORMED (VARIOUS)

» [PS4] Smashing rival racers extends your Team Ultimate, meaning high speeds and invincibility for even longer.

but it also adds a layer of complexity. There's a lot going on in *Team Sonic Racing*, and it can feel a bit chaotic and overwhelming to begin with. Fortunately the game does a good job of highlighting opposing racers by outlining them in red, and the game starts you off fairly gently, with the early races in Team Adventure mode only featuring a single opposing team. Once you've got some experience this feels like second nature, and really adds to online racing experience if you're communicating with your team.

Speaking of the Team Adventure mode, this is the main single-player aspect of the game, consisting of a series of challenges spread across a map. Many of these are races, but, as in Sumo's previous racers, there are plenty of other events, too – ring-collecting challenges, destruction races, star post slaloms and more. The challenge here is well balanced, as simple progression is none too taxing but those who aim for full completion will find themselves stretched. There is a blemish here, though, in the form of the survival races – unlocking keys in some of these requires you to complete a race without any of your teammates being eliminated. While you can pass items to them and activate Team Ultimates, that's the extent of the assistance you can offer, and you're left to depend on the AI not to screw up. But the AI *will* screw up, and if that doesn't infuriate you, we commend your patience.

That's not the only knock on the game, though. Nine of the 21 tracks in the game have been lifted from previous entries in the series, and while the tracks are great to race, they're not so easy to memorise because they often look similar – there's not enough to differentiate the likes of Ocean View and Roulette Road from Whale Lagoon and Bingo Party. What's more, these are hardly the most recognisable *Sonic* locations. Some fans will be thrilled to see favourite locations from *Sonic Heroes* and *Sonic Unleashed*, but other stages feel like they could fit into any kart racer. The lack of representation for Mega Drive era iconography is baffling, too, given how well *Sonic Mania* performed in the recent past. Additionally, although they weren't ruinous, we experienced performance drops when playing on the regular PS4 hardware. The game aims for 60fps, but often falls short.

Team Sonic Racing is an attractive kart racer with solid handling, nicely balanced weapons and well-designed tracks, and its central idea generally works pretty well. But while the team racing is fine, it's not nearly as exciting as the ever-changing tracks and transforming vehicles of *Sonic & All-Stars Racing Transformed*, so it simply doesn't measure up to its predecessor. That leaves *Team Sonic Racing* in an awkward place, as you can pick that game up pretty cheaply for PC and Xbox One (via backwards compatibility). If you're a Switch player, *Mario Kart 8 Deluxe* offers a more polished kart racing experience, with more content. If you've exhausted the other games in the genre and need something new, *Team Sonic Racing* is likely to satisfy you – it just wouldn't be our first choice of kart racer. ✱

In a nutshell

Although there's plenty of fun to be had with its well-implemented team racing mechanics, *Team Sonic Racing* just feels like second best compared to both *Mario Kart*'s and *Sonic*'s past racing endeavours.

>> Score **76%**

» [PS4] Most tracks offer an alternate route or two – this jump between tunnels crosses over the main track.

PICK OF THE MONTH

Castlevania Anniversary Collection

» **System:** Switch (tested) Xbox One, PS4, PC » **Buy it from:** Online » **Buy it for:** £15.99

The second of Konami's trilogy of compilations to celebrate its 50th anniversary is now with us, and it's a marked improvement over last month's *Arcade Classics*. The big news here is that coding duties are being handled by emulation master M2, and while we've noticed a few hiccups what's on offer is very, very good considering this is essentially a budget release.

Before we move onto the presentation, however, let's take a look at the actual games which have been included. *Anniversary Collection* features all three NES games, Super *Castlevania IV*, *Castlevania: Bloodlines*, two Game Boy titles: *Castlevania: The Adventure* and *Castlevania II: Belmont's Revenge* and the quirky NES game, *Kid Dracula*. This last title is worth mentioning as it was originally a Japanese exclusive (only the Game Boy port reached our shores) and it's also been localised which is typical of the effort we'd expect from M2. While we could moan about the games that haven't been included, it's worth noting that bar *Simon's Quest* and *Castlevania: The Adventure*, this is a strong collection of games, with *Castlevania III*, *Super Castlevania IV* and *Bloodlines* being the highlights. What's more Japanese versions of the games will be available via a free update.

Presentation is also good with a digital art book, lots of different screen-filtering options, including pixel-perfect displays, as well as the ability to add scanlines, which we always see as essential when using modern TVs. The Game Boy games also feature a cool dot matrix effect meaning they can look just like they did on your original handheld. There's a distinct lack of decent wallpapers if you're fully intending to play each game in its original 4:3 mode, but it's hardly the end of the world when you consider what you get for your £16. While we've noticed a few sound problems, and are upset by the exclusion of the various GBA games and *Symphony Of The Night,* it's hard to grumble when you're getting so many classic games for your money.

» Score **84%**

» [Switch] Most of the issues seem to relate to an early ROM of *Castlevania* that's been used. We'd imagine it will be patched out.

» [Switch] *Kid Dracula* is a lovely addition to the series, although it's a shame the Game Boy version isn't included.

Puyo Puyo Champions

» **System:** Switch (Tested), PS4, Xbox One, PC
» **Buy it from:** Online » **Buy it for:** £7.99

***Puyo Puyo* lends itself well to ruthless competition, and this slim digital-only package offers the most popular *Puyo Puyo* rulesets for a primarily multiplayer audience.** *Puyo Puyo 2* is the most familiar, operating like *Mean Bean Machine* but with the ability to counter incoming garbage, while *Puyo Puyo Fever* adds three and four-puyo drop formations and the ability to trigger prebuilt Fever combos.

You can play local and online multiplayer, as well as CPU matches, but there's no solo campaign. The netcode is rock-solid and replay options are plentiful, making this a decent package for experienced players seeking competition. Sadly, the game does little to educate beginners, who'll likely prefer *Puyo Puyo Tetris*.

» Score **80%**

Dangerous Driving

» **System:** Xbox One (tested) PS4
» **Buy it from:** Online, retail » **Buy it for:** £24.99

From the moment you roar off the starting line, perform your first drift and aggressively send a rival car flying through the air, *Dangerous Driving*'s ancestry becomes instantly obvious. Sure it lacks the glossy presentation that saturated the later EA games, and yes there are a few technical issues, but this is *Burnout* in all but name and it's great fun.

Three Fields Entertainment's arcade racing expertise is on show here, from the well-balanced roster of vehicles, to the dynamic tracks and ferociously challenging AI opponents. There's no doubt of its budget roots (Spotify Premium is used in lieu of in-game music to save budget, for example) and some will want more content, but it's priced accordingly and offers great value.

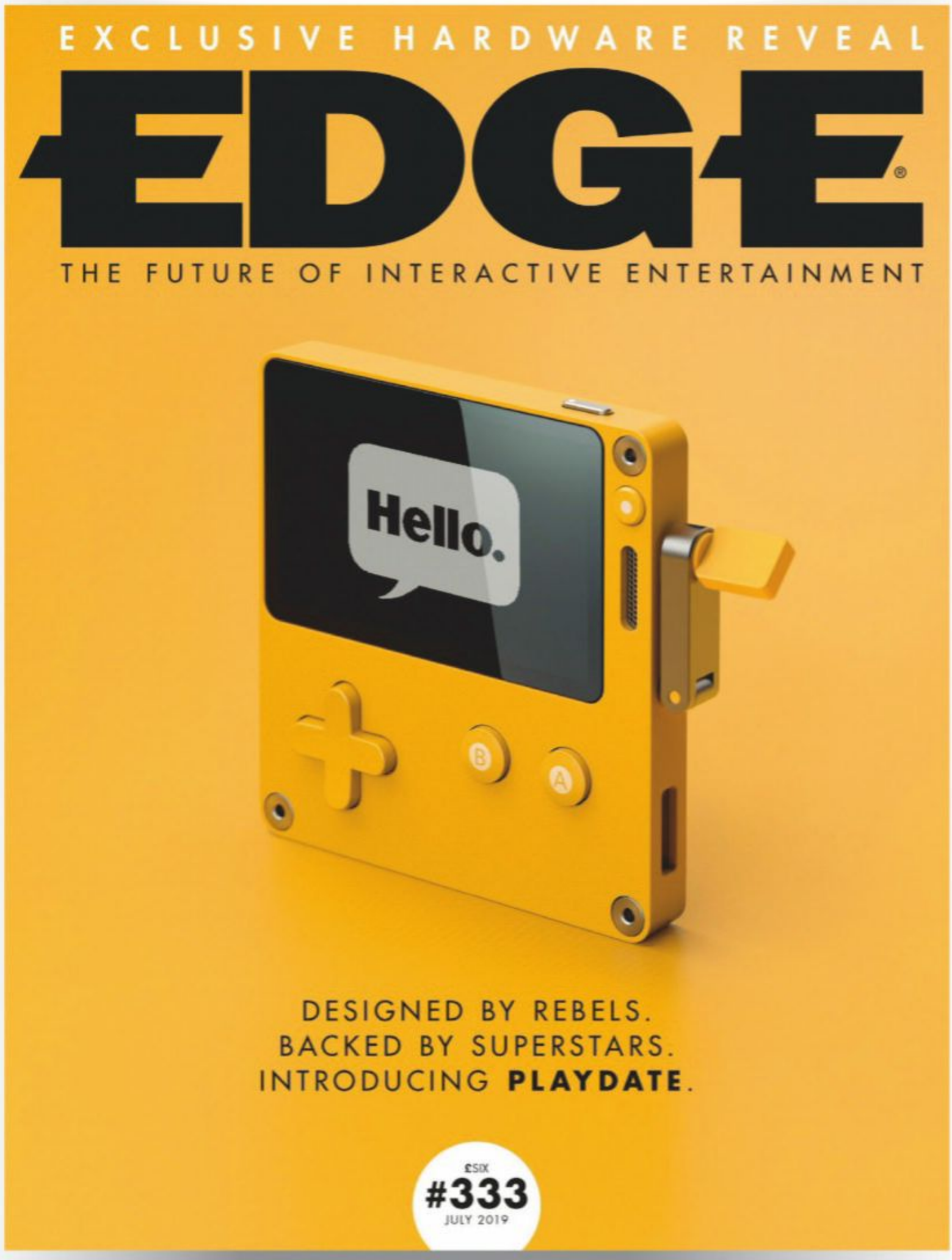
» Score **74%**

Guilty Gear 20th Anniversary Pack

» **System:** Switch » **Buy it from:** Online, retail
» **Buy it for:** £29.99

Rather than going for a full compilation, Arc System Works has chosen to focus on just two games – the very first *Guilty Gear*, and *Guilty Gear XX Accent Core Plus R*, the final sprite-based entry in the series. While it might have been nice to have the versions in between, this approach serves to highlight just how far the series has come. The original game was inventive but always felt rough, and two decades of progress have not helped that. The newer game takes those outlandish characters and adds plenty more, and coupled with a highly refined fighting system this makes for an excellent game. It also offers plenty to do, with various single-player modes and online battles.

» Score **80%**



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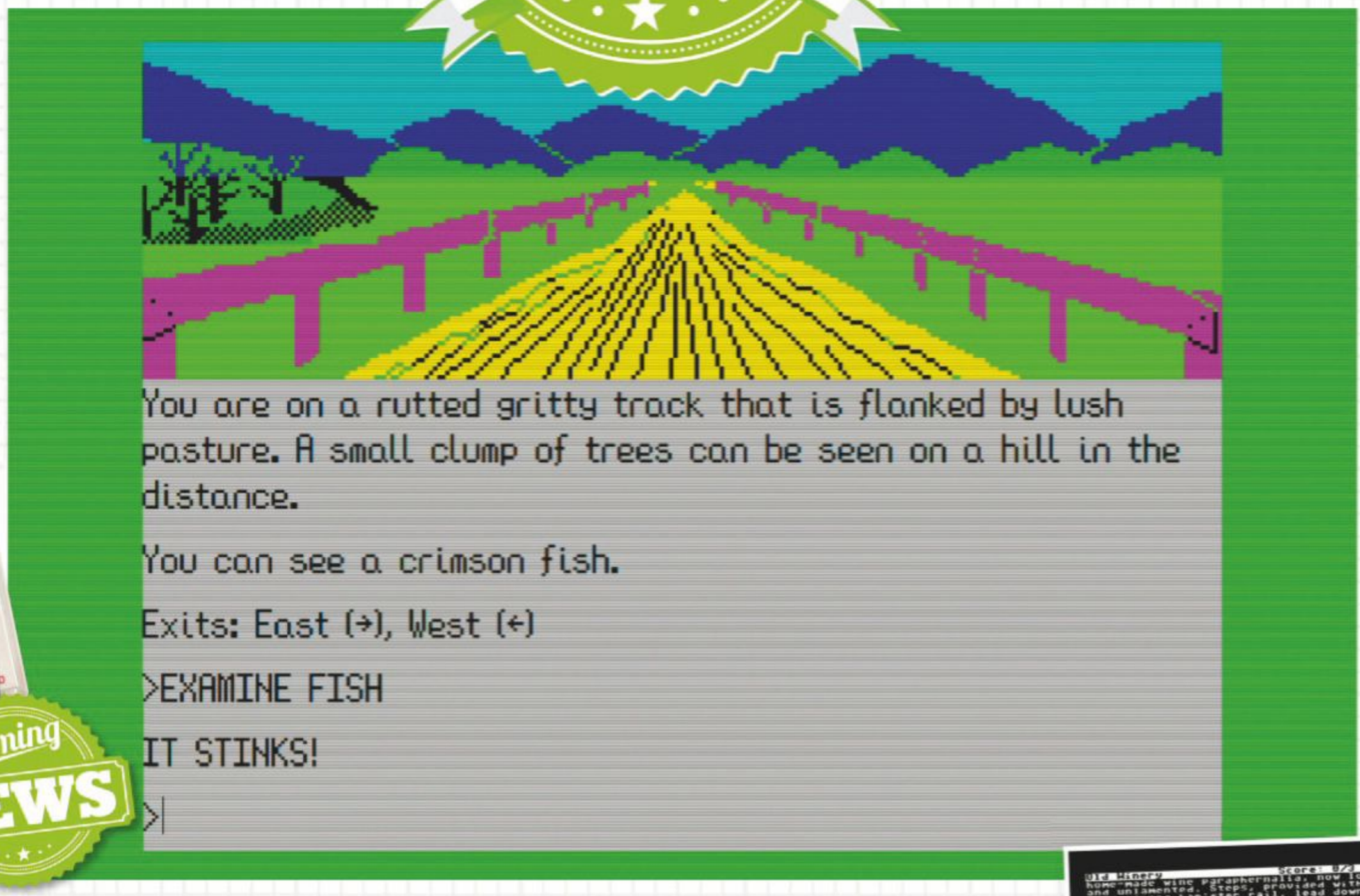
Gamers HOMEBREW

Brewing since 2005


You are on a rutted gritty track that is flanked by lush pasture. A small clump of trees can be seen on a hill in the distance.
You can see a crimson fish.
Exits: East (→), West (←)
>EXAMINE FISH
IT STINKS!
>

» [PC] A crimson fish? Sounds like this might be a red herring.

Gaming NEWS

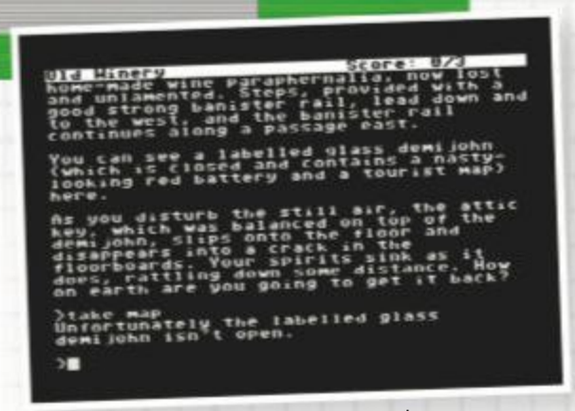
EXCITING ADVENTURES

Being a medium gives a person the ability to talk with the dead and hear 'echoes' of events from the past. It also opens up unusual and exciting chances to travel outside of our physical realm to explore the 'Phantom Zones', essentially the otherworldly places where major events that have shaped history took place. And that's what you were doing aboard a flying boat in terrible weather, just before being washed 'ashore' near The House On The Other Side Of The Storm, and it doesn't take long to realise that the natives aren't friendly. As text adventures go that's a pretty unusual story so, if you find it intriguing, head to Kikstart.me.uk/house-storm-c64.

Staying with text adventures, Ozmoo is an open source engine for playing Infocom's Inform-powered adventures on the C64. There are plenty of those to choose from, including *Leather Goddesses Of Phobos* and the *Planetfall* series, but it's also possible to play hundreds of games which weren't previously released on the C64, and would-be designers can create their own interactive stories and bundle them up for publishing as standalone disk images with this new engine. Further information on Ozmoo and some notes on how to get it up and running can be found at Kikstart.me.uk/ozmoo-c64, and an example of what it can do when bundled with an existing file can be found at Kikstart.me.uk/curses-c64.

For adventurers who like their text accompanied by some graphics, check out *Excalibur: Sword Of Kings,* which is web-based and sets the player off to rescue Arthur, who is currently in need of saving since he's being held prisoner in Camelot by an evil sorceress called Crania. This is a remake from the Spectrum and the developer hopes that it can act as an introduction to the world of text adventures, which is why he's grafted in an optional tutorial system. Kikstart.me.uk/excalibur-web links to the game and more information.

Finally, there's more interactive fiction in development with *Athanor 2 - The Legend Of The Birdmen* for the Atari ST and Amiga which offers explorers either a text-based input system or point-and-click controls. It's currently only in French but there's an English translation in the works, and there's a video of a recent build of the game linked to behind Kikstart.me.uk/athanor-2-prv-st which showcases some excellent graphics and an impressive soundtrack.


Old Hungry
Score: 1/2
You can see a labelled glass demi-john (which is closed and contains a nasty-looking red battery and a tourist map) here.
As you disturb the still air, the attic key, which was balanced on top of the demi-john, slips onto the floor and disappears into a crack in the floorboards. Your spirits sink as it does, rattling down some distance. How on earth are you going to get it back?
>take map
Unfortunately the labelled glass demijohn isn't open.

» [C64] Lost the key, can't get the map and generally having a bad day in *Curses*.

» [C64] This old house may not be inviting, but at least it's safer than being outside.

NEW GAMES NEEDED

If you have a homebrew project you would like to see featured then please contact us at: **retrogamer@futurenet.com**

» [Amiga] Going for a headshot and hoping for the best.

ROBOT RAMPAGE

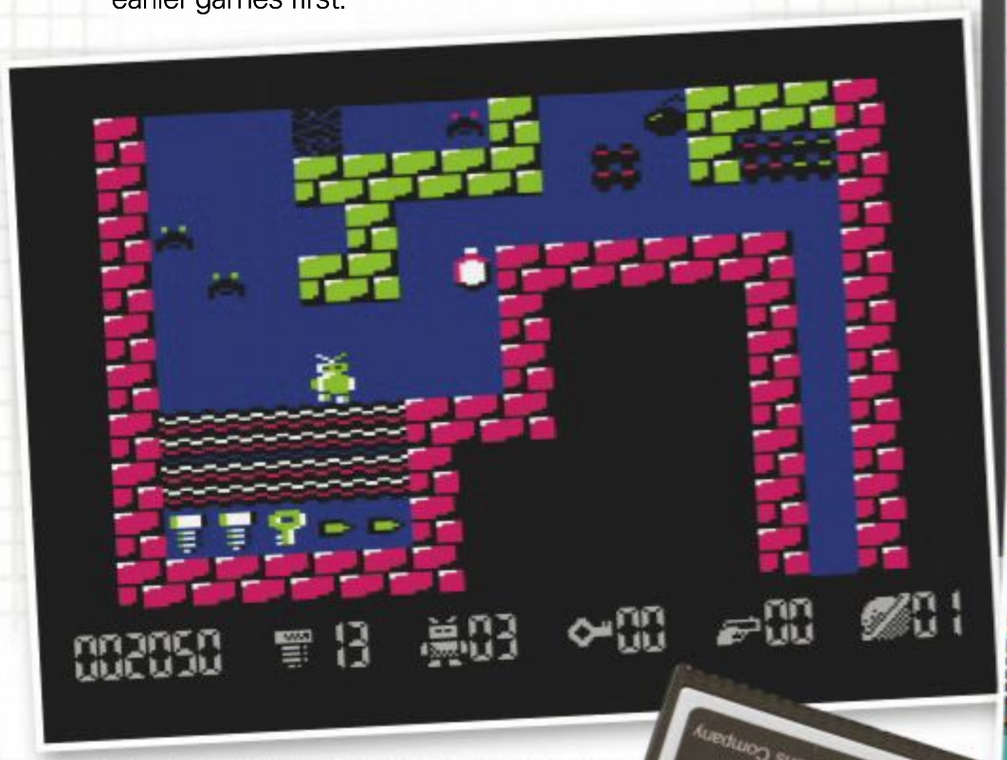
Dekadence's *Cyberwolf* is a *Wolfenstein*-like first-person shooter which is targeting stock 68000-based Amiga systems. The version that we are linking to over at Kikstart.me.uk/cyberwolf-prv-amiga is more of a tech demo than anything else – there's a warning on the linked YouTube video's description that it might fail on faster machines – so the game is still very much a work in progress.

The good news, however, is that *Cyberwolf* looks technically remarkable and what's there looks reasonable, if a little repetitive at the moment, so hopefully the final game will add more diverse graphics and enemy types.

30 YEARS OF ROBBO

We don't usually cover level packs, but *Robbo After 30 Years* for the Atari 8-bit was released by Lukas Bezdek to celebrate the action puzzle game's 30th anniversary. The original game is a little like *Boulder Dash* but without the gravity and a hint of *Sokoban* added, with the titular robot needing to be safely guided through puzzles on each stage to progress.

Fans of the series can get stuck in over at Kikstart.me.uk/robbo-30-a8, but newcomers might want to start their training with one of the earlier games first.



» [Atari 8-bit] There's lots of toys here, but how to reach them?

HOMEBREW HEROES

Zack Manko at Mega Cat Studios is one of the people behind Lethal Wedding for the Mega Drive and, while we've heard of fights breaking out at weddings, they don't usually involve guns!

THE BIG INTERVIEW

A wedding-themed scrolling shoot-'em-up, where did that concept come from?
We wanted to do a game that empowered women while still enabling them to be feminine. The concept of a wedding gave us some conventions to work with – like the classic conflict between brides-to-be and their future mothers-in-law, or the stress of being the maid of honour. We turned these motifs into interesting characters and plot points that highlight how women can be badass without having to be masculine. Doing a pun-laden game that plays with a lot of action tropes allowed us to do this while still retaining our humour and silliness.

Who was involved with *Lethal Wedding*'s creation and roughly how long did it take to develop?
The team on *Lethal Wedding* was great to begin with, and our time together on this one has only made us more deadly! Mikhail and Andy are absolute beasts at cramming in content and features. Bel, Savannah, and Maryna gave us some stunning pixel art. Karl and Mitch provided some killer music and SFX. We're really proud of what we've accomplished, especially with only a handful of people.

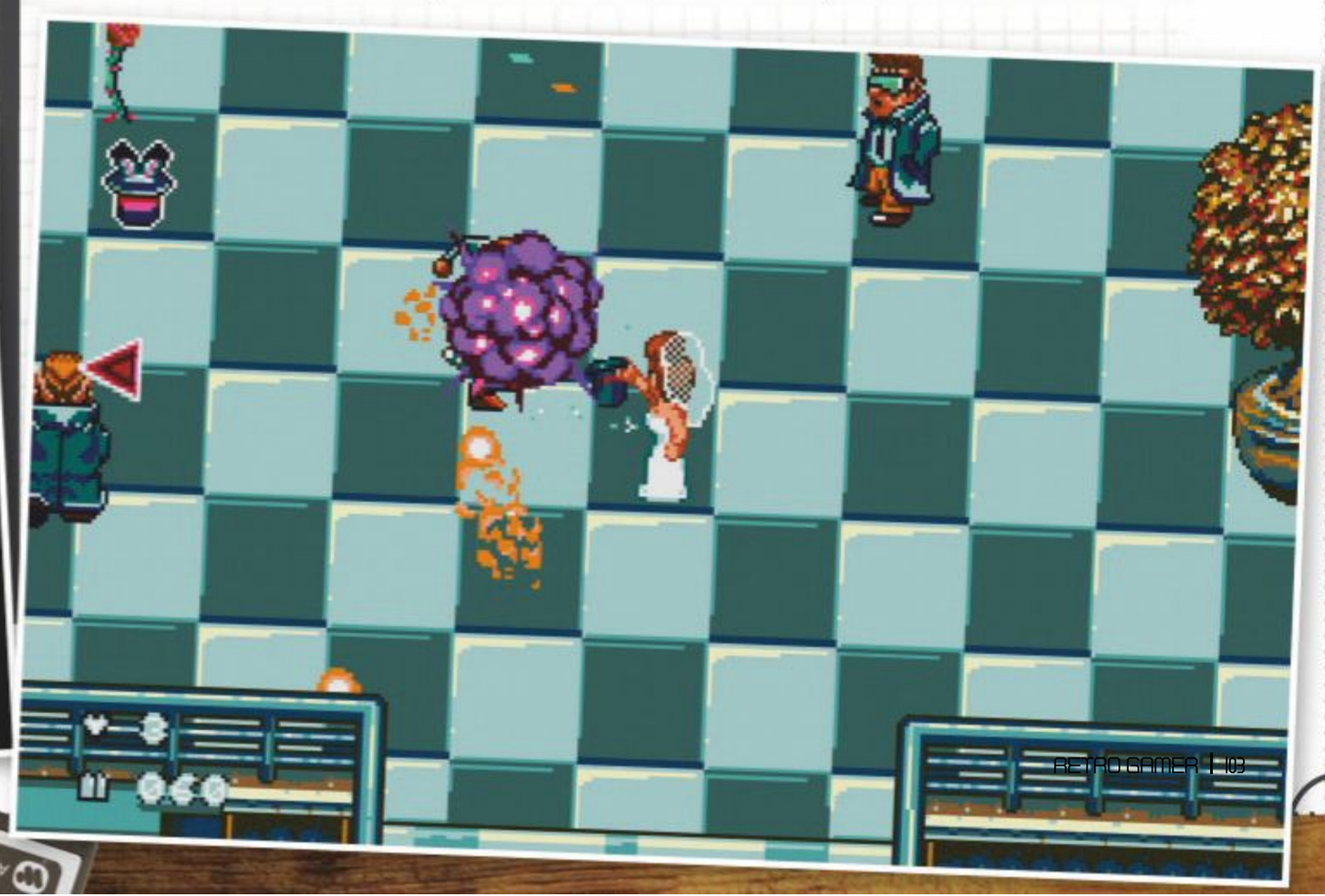
» [Mega Drive] At least the weather is nice today, apart from it raining bullets.

What challenges did *Lethal Wedding* present during development?
As with any retro project, the biggest challenge is figuring out how to fit in all the content. Appealing to modern gamers with a 30-year-old console can be a challenge, but we've become experts at marrying the best of gaming's past with its future.

And is there anything you would have done differently with hindsight?
Each time we complete a game we refine our processes a bit more. *Lethal Wedding* taught us the value of adding polish and juice sooner, rather than leaving it as one of the later steps in development. Even a few simple player feedback elements can make a game feel way better, and the sooner a game reaches this point, the sooner we can showcase it.

What kind of feedback have you received from Mega Drive gamers so far?
Although we haven't released a trailer or anything yet, we have been slowly leaking some snapshots and GIFs here and there, and the response has been great! The art is gorgeous. The concept is silly. And the action is intense! There's a lot to love here, and I'm excited to see what people think of the final finished product.

Finally, do you have any future projects our readers might be interested in?
Bite The Bullet, our RPG roguelite shooter! It's the world's first run-and-gun-and-eat game, where you eat enemies to level up your character. If you want more retro action, check out *The Meating*, a puzzle platformer for the NES. You play as the ghost of a minotaur on a quest to reclaim his tragically-sourced meat from butchers, bodybuilders, and gravy-loving connoisseurs!



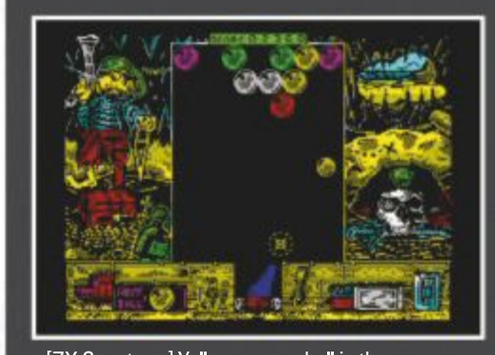
Gaming

REVIEWS

DO YOU REMEMBER?

Take to the high seas and man the cannons for *Cannon Bubble,* a pirate-themed version of Taito's classic arcade puzzler *Puzzle Bobble.* Each of the game's stages starts with the playfield partially filled with coloured cannonballs and the player must fire similarly hued projectiles to form clusters of three or more which then tumble harmlessly down the screen, taking anything they were supporting along for the ride.

More balls are randomly added to the pile over time to make things a little bit more trickier, but there are a couple of extra items which help the player out. Bombs, unsurprisingly, blow away whatever is around them when they settle and every cannonball of a specific colour will be removed when one is touched by a skull. *Cannon Bubble* is fun, colourful and has a jolly AY soundtrack. Head your way over to Kikstart.me.uk/cannon-bubble-spec.

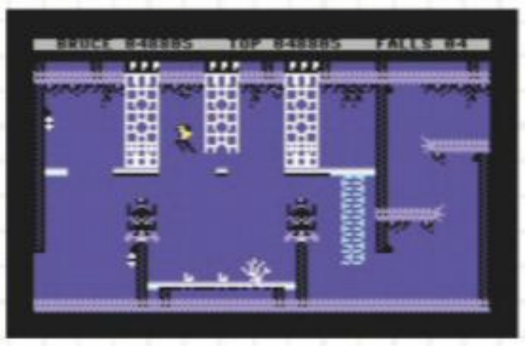


» [ZX Spectrum] Yellow cannonball in the corner pocket… or is this not snooker?

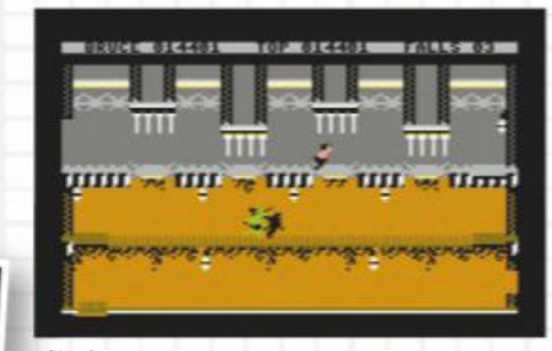
» [ZX Spectrum] Chipping away at the wall of balls, three at a time.

BRUCE LEE – RETURN OF FURY

» **PLATFORM:** COMMODORE 64 » **DEVELOPER:** MEGASTYLE » **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.ME.UK/BRUCE-ROF-C64 » **PRICE:** FREE



» [C64] Dramatically leaping across flamethrowers using a disappearing platform.



» [C64] Bruce will have to be quick or he'll get crushed under some spikes.

Bruce Lee's first videogame outing was released in 1984 and, rather than re-enacting one of the legendary martial artist's movies, Datasoft's interpretation instead saw Bruce himself at the doors of an evil wizard's fortress, intending to nip in and borrow whatever riches might have been left hanging around while perhaps even defeating the house sorcerer in the process to earn infinite wealth and immortality.

The latter doesn't seem to have panned out however, because *Bruce Lee 2* opens with our hero standing at the entrance to a second fortress and very much mortal. As with his previous outing, each room of this new lair is a challenge in itself and, along with ladders to climb and platforms to leap between, there are deadly traps galore to manoeuvre around including motion-triggered flamethrowers and moving barriers that are fatal to the touch.

Bruce's primary objective is to gather all of the lanterns which in turn unlock doors leading further towards the final encounter, but traversing many of the rooms is made more difficult by the repeated appearances of previous foes Green Yamo and the Ninja, each bringing their own fighting style and wanting a good scrap. Both opponents appear randomly and can be either avoided or fought, but neither is particularly bright and they can often be enticed into the traps which in turn gives Bruce a short break until they materialise once more.

There's already an unofficial sequel to Bruce Lee for the C64 from a couple of years ago – a conversion of the Windows-flavoured *Bruce Lee 2* – but that was written from scratch by the developer while this is instead running on a slightly modified version of the original Bruce Lee engine from 1984. Gamers who haven't played that original game might want to find their feet by playing through it before moving on to this sequel – the difficulty curve is noticeably steeper on *Bruce Lee 2* – but this is a very well-thought-out and worthy successor.

» Score **90%**

WASTELAND

» **PLATFORM:** ATARI 8-BIT
» **DEVELOPER:** MICHAEL JASKULA » **PRICE:** FREE
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.ME.UK/WASTELAND-A8

» [Atari 8-bit] That terminal looks like it might control something important? Let's give it a try.

Being the survivor of a nuclear incident is a pretty lousy way to start the week, but there's a way out. If you can locate six energy cells scattered around and in some cases below the wasteland they can be used to power an escape pod to sunnier, less radioactive climes.

The problem is that you're not actually alone, there are rampaging machines patrolling the wilderness and in some cases homing in on body heat. Health packs can be found to reverse the damage from these encounters and computer terminals also help by deactivating devices, opening doors or turning the lights on in one of the underground sections.

There's a surprising amount of atmosphere in *Wasteland*, some of it from backstory in diary entries and the rest being down to the cautious way that players will need to explore the terrain avoiding drones and radioactive areas.

» Score **89%**

» [Atari 8-bit] Post-apocalyptic cities always look suspiciously like Milton Keynes.

MODSURFER

» **PLATFORM:** COMMODORE AMIGA
» **DEVELOPER:** ARCANIST » **PRICE:** FREE
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.ME.UK/MODSURFER-AMIGA

The Amiga is known for its musical abilities, in particular the modules composed for games and demos in programs like Soundtracker. But what if you could *see* that music, perhaps even roll a 'Boing' ball along a highway while gathering trinkets which have been placed based on the notes similar to the game *Audiosurf* but with a healthy dose of *Trailblazer* for good measure?

That's what *ModSurfer* does and, as with *Audiosurf*, the results vary depending on the music that you choose to use, but the author has provided an archive of different tunes that will get players going. It's worth servicing that old Commodore brick mouse before playing, though, because it's really going to get thrown around the mat with this one, especially on the faster modules.

» Score **88%**

» [Amiga] *Jammin' In The Wind* is very dynamic, so the track changes speed a lot.

ROUNDUP

Sometimes game designers don't put much effort into their storylines, but *Higgy 2 – The Wrath Of McMania* sees the titular hero trying to rescue his kidnapped cat Titch from a parody of WWE owner Vince McMahon's castle in the sky. If that sounds like your kind of bonkers, there's more information at Kikstart.me.uk/higgy-2-spec.

But why play just one game when you can have many at the same time? That's the premise behind the web-based *Super Spectrum World* which throws the player into a bustling world that's been built using screens from *Jet Set Willy*, *Jetpac*, *Exolon* and countless other classic Spectrum titles, each of them littered with items to collect. The exploration begins behind Kikstart.me.uk/super-spec-world-web.

BLASTERGEAR

» **PLATFORM:** WINDOWS » **DEVELOPER:** TEAM OVERLOADED » **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.ME.UK/BLASTERGEAR-WIN » **PRICE:** FREE

Earth has been taken over by the sinister Oracle and their plan is very simple, to erase all sentient life from the planet. That doesn't sit too well with the populace, so it's time for a one-person revolution, which sees the Volt Gear launched and diving headlong into battle against the invading forces, pausing only to upgrade its weapons along the way with items left behind from downed Oracle craft.

There are five graphically varied areas to blast through and huge numbers of heavily armed enemies occupying them, so *BlasterGear* leans towards the bullet hell end of the shooter spectrum and might prove too much of a challenge for players selecting the default difficulty. It does offer a casual mode, though, which is easier on less-experienced pilots still acclimatising to using the Volt Gear's ability to shoot backwards.

» Score **85%**

» [Windows] Blasting off again after receiving an upgrade for the craft.

DIFFICULTY

●○○○○

LOW

FORMAT

» VARIOUS

HANDY HINTS

» It's worth thinking about what you're trying to accomplish. Physically pile your games collection together and divide the games up according to format, so at least you know where you're starting from.

» Don't be afraid to use this as an opportunity to spring clean. Ended up with multiple copies of the same game? Consider this the time to sell them on or trade them with a friend.

GOING MOBILE

Your smartphone offers loads of great options for organising and managing your games. It won't take long to be able to take a list of your collection with you wherever you go

» **Gameye**
facebook.com/GAMEYEVG/

Gameye works via manual entry, as well as scanning barcodes or loose cartridges. It has an encyclopaedia, too.

» **iCollect**
sortitapps.com

With high-res art, offline viewing, bulk scanning, and a desktop version, iCollect has all you need to catalogue your collection.

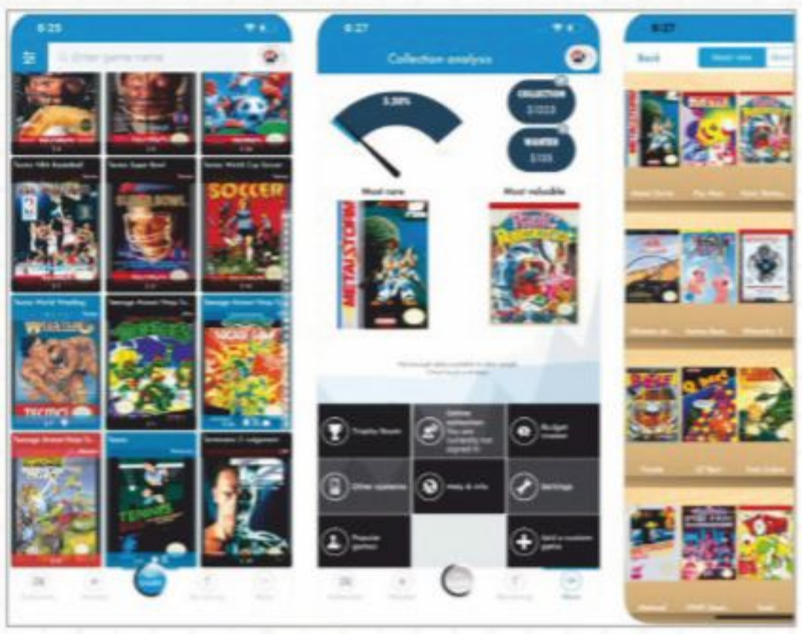
» **Retro Game Collector**
puregaming.org

Focusing on rarity and value with regular updates for each, Retro Game Collector is ideal for the more refined collector.

HOW TO...

MANAGE YOUR GAMES COLLECTION

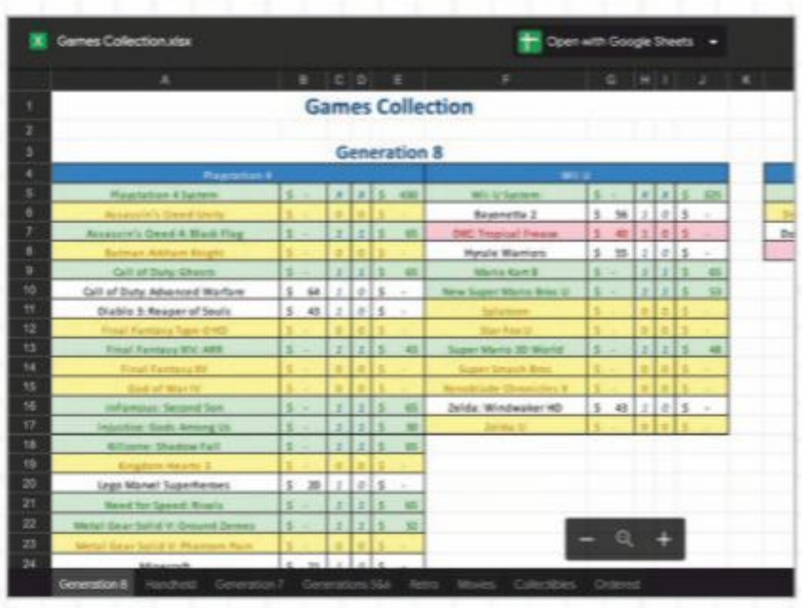
Keeping track of your ever-growing games collection can seem overwhelming. Take a little time away from staring at your shelves, though, and you'll be surprised at the wealth of apps and websites that can help you get more organised. Jen Allen breaks it down



01 For those times when you're collecting rather than playing, an app like Retro Game Collector is the best way to keep on top of things. It supports multiple different consoles and shows how rare your games are as well as helps you track recent purchases and sales. You can easily share collections with others digitally, too, rather than inviting fellow collectors up to your attic or shed.

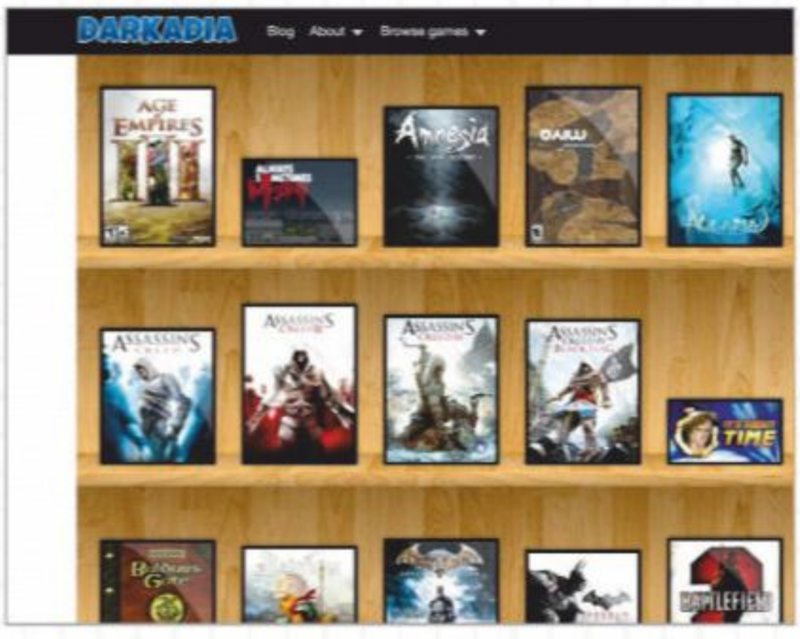
02 If you are trying to keep on top of the games that you really should play but haven't got around to just yet, Grouvee is the site to use. It separates games into virtual shelves of Played, Playing, Backlog and Wish List, so you always know exactly what's going on with your collection. There's an option for recommending what to play next, too.

Played any good games lately
the best place on the Internet to catalog your video gar
and track your backlog.
Sign Up
mes
Track your Backlog
Follow you



03 It's not the prettiest or quickest of solutions, but a simple Excel or Google Docs-based spreadsheet is a useful way of managing your games collection. Simply spend some time creating your own layout or use one from the Reddit Game Collecting community, and it'll expand with your collection at no expense. Just don't expect fancy box art or extra information.

04 Odds are most of your collection is stored on shelves, so how about a virtual shelving system? Darkadia provides just that with a shelf-like backdrop for the box art of your games. You can add secure notes, like CD keys and serial numbers, too. It's ideal for when you'd rather keep big boxes out of the way.



Something you'd like to see a guide for? Contact us at:
RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com

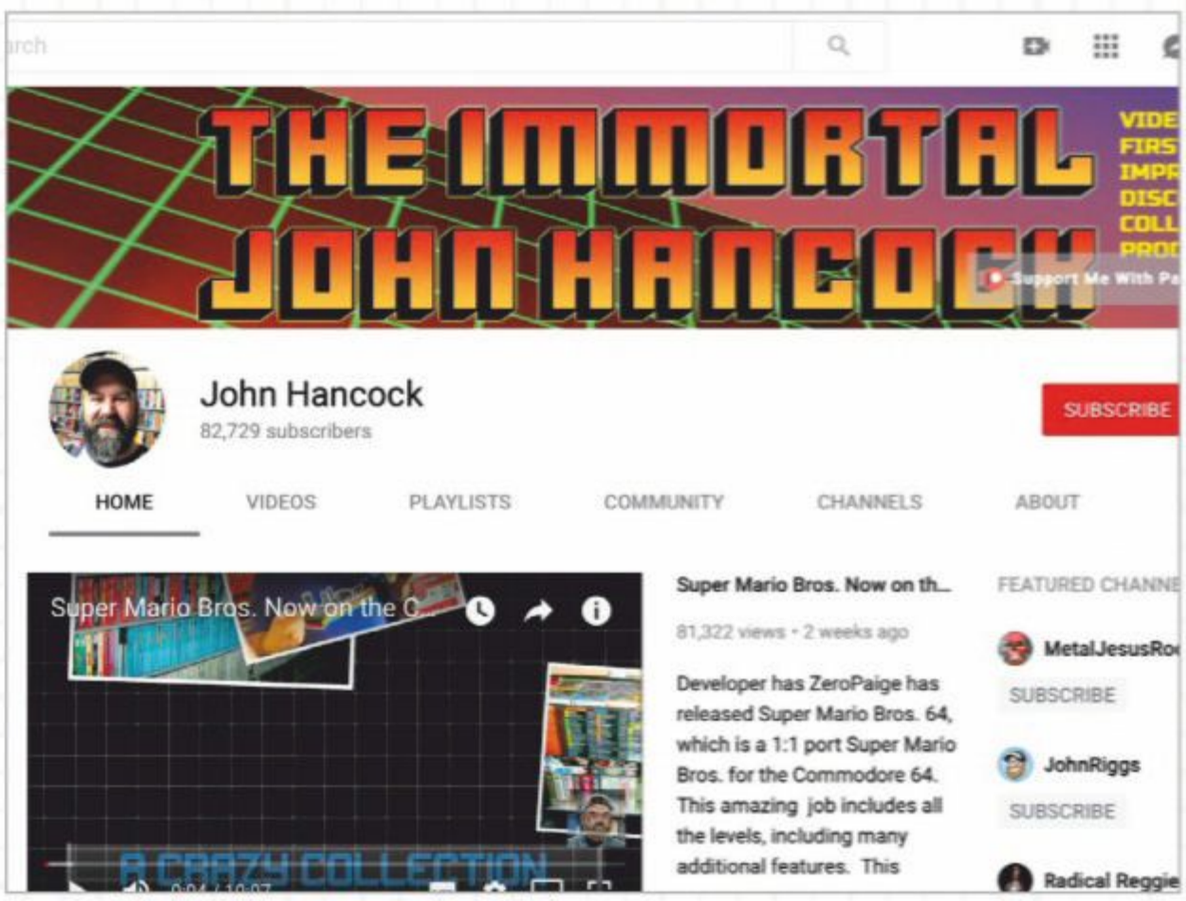
WHAT'S NEXT?

Q: My collection is huge! Where do I even begin?
A: Spend a day separating everything according to console and work from there. Tackle the smallest collection first, add it to a website or app and store it. Then it's time to move onto the next one. Enjoy picking out the memories as you go along.

Q: Where should I store my games collection?
A: It's important to store your games somewhere safe. Don't store your collection in a garage or shed. Both are often too cold or dusty and you'd be on the path to damaging your collection. Instead, store your games somewhere comfortable. Ideally, inside your home where temperatures don't change drastically and you can keep an eye on their quality.

Q: Should I use special containers for my games?
A: If you don't want to display your games, but you want them to be safe, use large plastic boxes with sturdy lids to put them away. They'll be safe from dust and spills that way. You can always have separate boxes for each genre or console, too.

"Don't store your collection in a garage or shed. Both are often too cold or dusty"



05 Managing your collection can be challenging, especially when you've been collecting for a long time. One of the best YouTube channels for discussing such things is John Hancock's. A teacher as well as collector, John appreciates the importance of organising time and space well, and provides useful videos on how best to maintain a collection.

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED...

A selection of smaller questions from readers...

WII WORTH IT

Is a first-gen Wii the better option for playing GameCube games?
Brad Belote via Twitter

The Wii isn't the prettiest option because the GameCube looks far nicer, that said, however, it is much cheaper to get hold of a second-hand Wii than it is a well-looked-after GameCube. There's the added advantage that many Wii games are still worth playing, too, so you're getting two consoles for the price of one. Just make sure that you buy a GameCube controller and memory card to go with it. The Wii controller makes playing GameCube games pretty uncomfortable.

THE BIG QUESTION

SNES or Mega Drive?
Steve Powell via Facebook

How can we possibly choose? It would be like choosing your favourite between your children. Occasionally, we might pick a favourite for five minutes, but it'll never last. Not when there's *Sonic* and *Mario* and *Zelda* and *Shining Force* and... well, it's a good life to have too many options.

RUINING CHILDHOODS

How do we recreate a famous blue hedgehog in a live-action film and not make it look ridiculous?
Graeme Mason via Twitter

First of all, don't add teeth. No one needs to see a toothy grin from a peculiarly groomed hedgehog echidna-style thing. Less is more, and that goes for Sonic's eyes too. Who'd have thought he'd suit having one giant eyeball rather than two eyes like everyone else? Maybe blue hedgehogs just work better in games than 'reality'.

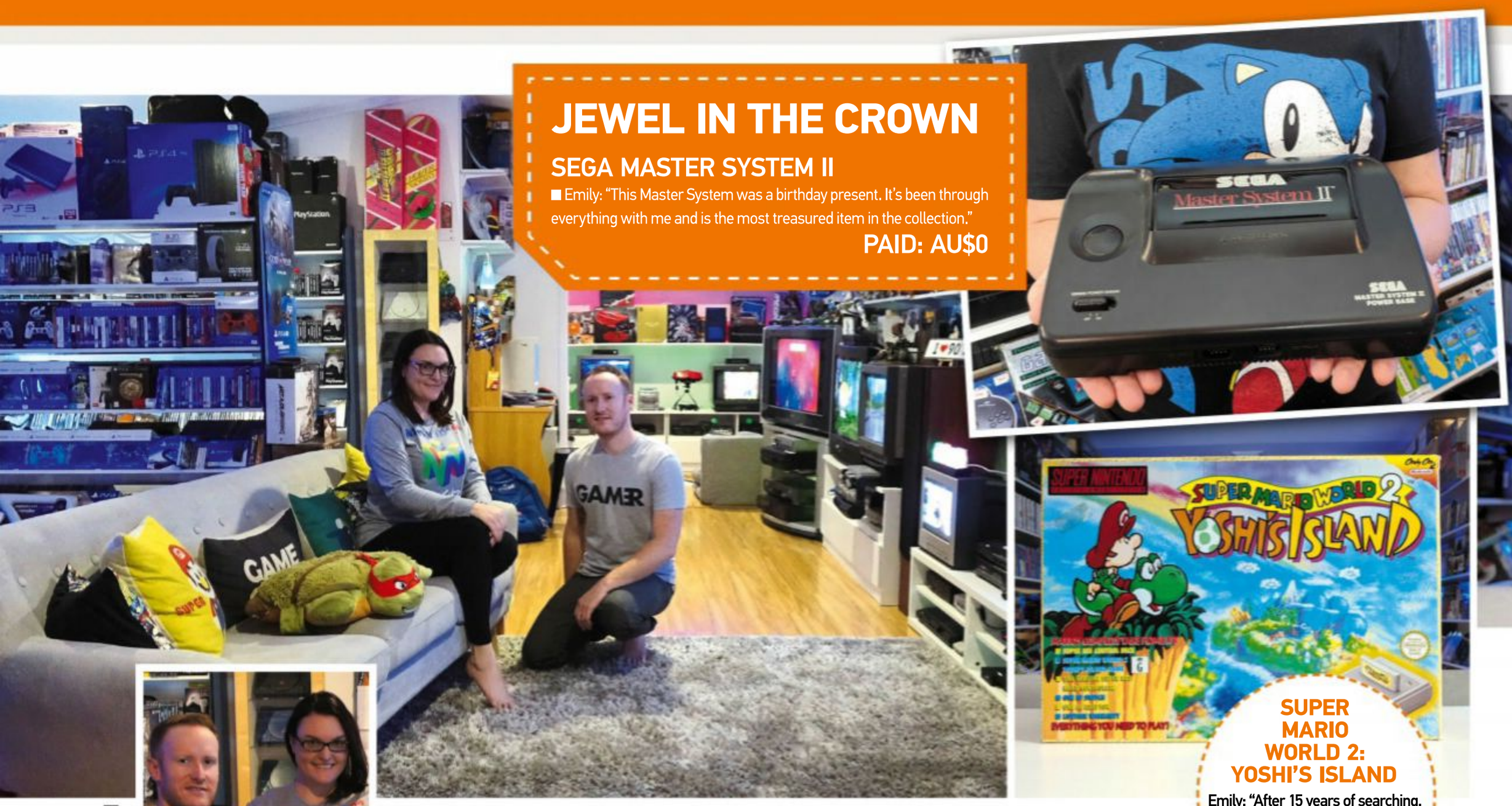
LOST IN TRANSLATION

How do I find out if a PAL game comes with an English language option or not? I buy games from Europe if I can get them cheaper than the UK, and typically it has an English option. There's been a few times where it's not included. Love to know if there's a way of checking.
Alexander Graham via Twitter

Unfortunately there's no definitive answer to this, Alexander. It's quite a tricky one. We would recommend doing your research online before purchasing a game; gaming forums are often a great resource for information, as you'll likely find someone in a similar situation to yourself. Sometimes publishers will state the available languages of a game on the packaging, however we've also found cases where we know a game has multiple language options but it isn't stated on the box. We wish you the best of luck!

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

READERS TAKE US THROUGH **THE RETRO KEYHOLE**



JEWEL IN THE CROWN

SEGA MASTER SYSTEM II

■ Emily: "This Master System was a birthday present. It's been through everything with me and is the most treasured item in the collection."

PAID: AU$0

SUPER MARIO WORLD 2: YOSHI'S ISLAND

Emily: "After 15 years of searching, I found one in near-mint condition at a price I was willing to pay."

PAID: AU$980

BIO

NAME:
Beau and Emily Dalton

FAVOURITE GAME:
Super Mario Bros 3 and *Metal Gear Solid*

FAVOURITE CONSOLE:
Super Nintendo and PlayStation

LOCATION
Brisbane, Australia

ESTIMATED VALUE:
AU$130,000

YOUTUBE:
Retro Gamer Girl

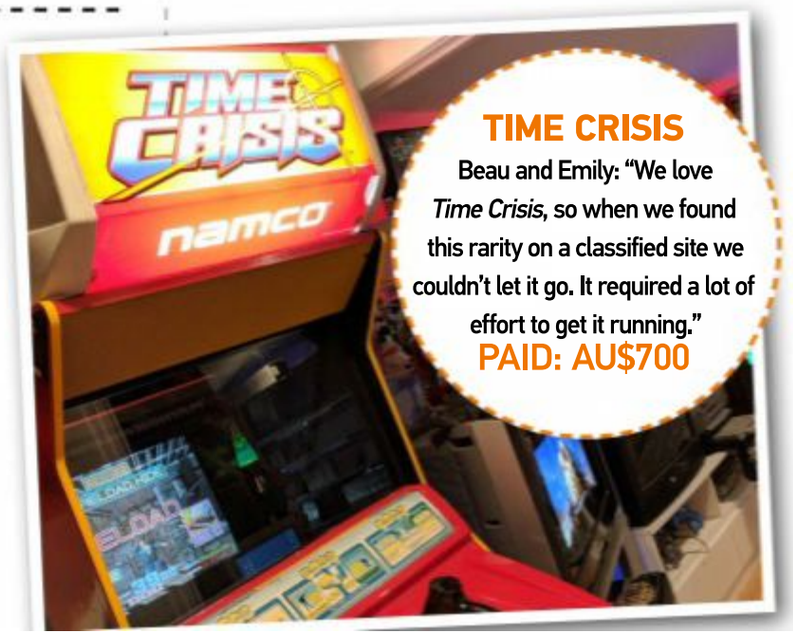
RETRO LOVE

We take a peek at this collecting couple's old-school stockpile

For this month's Collector's Corner we are featuring *two* collectors from across the pond in Brisbane, Australia. "We met through mutual friends in 2005 and within months were sharing our love for retro gaming," begins Emily, already warming our hearts with this story of love and retro. Despite their common general interest in gaming, Emily and her partner, Beau, grew up loving rival systems. "The first console that got me into gaming was the Master System, playing *Alex Kidd In Miracle World* and *Penguin Land*," remembers Emily, while Beau, unaware of his future love gaming away on Sega's 8-bit console, was busy playing *Duck Hunt* and *Super Mario Bros* on his NES. "But we don't really have any rivalry in the house as we love all platforms, although we are very partial to the PlayStation and Nintendo."

Upon moving in together, Emily and Beau's existing collections became an impressive set of consoles and games. Then, in 2012, a trip to Japan inspired them to take their collecting to a new level, as Emily recalls. "We didn't actually buy that many gaming items on our first trip, but it did spur on several more visits and a newfound love for Japanese-exclusive consoles and games. Being the mecca of videogames, there's always a store to go searching in – nothing quite like the thrill of the hunt in Japan!" The most impressive result of this searching is Emily's complete set of retail Japanese Nintendo 64 consoles, including two that were given away as competition prizes, and now she's on the hunt for more N64 goodies. "I've always wanted to replace all the boxes I threw away as a teen, so over the last few years I've been trying to buy empty boxes from eBay and trading with friends. In 2019 I'd love to have all those N64 loose carts complete in box." However, Beau is a huge fan of the Nintendo 64's rival, the PlayStation. "Nostalgia is a big part of gaming for me, so I'd love to relive the joy of holding a brand-new PlayStation in my arms," he says. "I'm not a completionist, so don't go after full sets of titles, but I have always wanted a new-in-box PAL SCPH-1002 PlayStation." As in the UK, eBay and Facebook marketplaces are the go-to places for finding retro gear in Australia. "We've been thrifting together for 14 years," continues Beau, "and retro gaming items have certainly dried up over this time. But there's still the odd bargain to be found if you're quick!"

Emily and Beau maintain a popular Instagram page each, and there's an impressive tour of their games room on their YouTube channel, Retro Gamer Girl. But like most collectors their story is not without its sad times. "In 2015 we sold our mint-in-box Sega Wondermega to help fund a trip to Europe," winces Emily. "We're still regretting it to this day as prices have increased significantly and buying one back would really hurt the bank!" Despite



TIME CRISIS

Beau and Emily: "We love *Time Crisis*, so when we found this rarity on a classified site we couldn't let it go. It required a lot of effort to get it running."

PAID: AU$700

Got an impressive collection of your own? Contact us at:
RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com

CUSTOM PLAYSTATION

Beau: "Jeffrey from Jevaho Creations is an amazing console customiser. *Jurassic Park* is one of my favourite movies, so I had to have this."

PAID: AU$380

JEWEL IN THE CROWN

10 MILLION EDITION MIDNIGHT BLUE PLAYSTATION

Beau: "No more than 300 were given away as prizes to celebrate the sale of 10 million PlayStations worldwide. I was lucky to purchase mine from the original prize winner in South Africa."

PAID: AU$1,750

their possessions also surviving a freak storm, this retro gaming couple still have an amazing collection that's well worth checking out on social media. "And whether it's retro or modern, we're usually always gaming together or watching one another beat a particular level in a game," concludes Emily. Ah, we love a happy ending.

BARGAIN HUNT

Your guide to the rising world of retro prices

KONAMI CLASSICS SUIKODEN I AND II

PlayStation games have boomed in value recently and Konami's brilliant RPG series *Suikoden* is no exception. The original game, set in a fictional world of political intrigue and war, can be picked up for as little as **£40-£50** by a patient buyer. However, its sequel, released in 1998 and held in higher regard by many fans, regularly commands **over £150** for a mint copy.

ZOMBIES ATE MY NEIGHBOURS

Not the most uncommon Mega Drive and SNES game, yet another that's steadily climbing in value. Expect to pay just under **£20** for a cartridge on either system, with boxed editions ranging from **£35-£50** depending on condition.

ROBOCOP 2

This Ocean movie licence was a good seller across a range of formats with the ZX Spectrum cassette release rarely going above **£5** posted. Much rarer – due to the console's failure – is the GX4000 cartridge which is likely to set you back **£30-£40** unboxed.

AMIGA POWER MAGAZINE

While a mint issue one will cost in excess of **£20**, most individual issues of this Nineties Amiga magazine go for around **£5-£10** with bundles the best way to pick them up cheaper, especially if you can avoid the hefty postage charges.

THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN AND CAPTAIN AMERICA: DR DOOM'S REVENGE

This Empire/Paragon Spidey-Cap crossover release from 1990 is one of the rarer *Spider-man* games. It includes an exclusive comic which is actually more fun than the game itself. Mint copies tend to go for **£40-£50**.

HOW MUCH?!

NINTENDO 64 TEST CARTRIDGE

There's been some odd goings-on with this Canadian auction from last month. Undoubtedly a rare item, the cartridge sold for just under **£1,000** after a bidding war, before the seller relisted the item at a Buy It Now price of over **£1,700**, unhappy at the previous final selling price. The second listing was withdrawn shortly afterwards, leaving us wondering where it ended up.

Prices correct at time of print

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STAR LETTER

VINTAGE GAMER

I've been reading on various websites lately that **Retro Gamer** should create a new magazine that's dedicated to 'proper' retro gaming. One person was suggesting it should be called 'Vintage Gamer' and that it should only feature 8-bit and 16-bit gaming, as only machines from that era are properly retro. Of course, this is absolute nonsense, and as I snorted milk through my nose I wondered if they realised what the ramifications of a magazine like Vintage Gamer would be. You've only got to look at various Kickstarters to see that there aren't millions of people out there looking to buy into a magazine like this, and it wouldn't be long before the **Retro Gamer** readership gets split down the middle.

It's rather elitist to assume that the only important retro machines are the ones you grew up with, and I believe it's damaging to the community as a whole to even suggest such silly things. **Retro Gamer** should mean something to everyone who has ever grown up with a games system, whether it's a ZX Spectrum or a Xbox 360 –that's right, I went there.
Yours faithfully,
Paul Bennett

We've had plenty of suggestions for Retro Gamer, including splitting the magazine into different eras. Ultimately, we're happy with the direction the magazine is in now. That said, we're planning something very special for issue 200.

» [Amstrad CPC] 'Vintage Gamer' would allow us to revisit *Dizzy*, Drew's favourite series. [Sigh… - Drew]

» Even games like *Night Trap* are now rising in price for Sega's add-on peripheral.

MEGA-CD MANIA

Dear **Retro Gamer**,
What on earth is going on with the prices of Mega-CD games at the moment? Prices seem to be reaching SNES levels of silliness, and it's highly unlikely that I'll now own a copy of *Snatcher* or *Keio Flying Squadron*, even titles like *Final Fight* are starting to constantly push past the £100 mark.

» [Mega Drive] Darran has lost count of the times he has purchased *Gunstar Heroes*.

Please don't feature any Mega-CD games in the magazine any more, as I don't want prices to go up higher than they already are.
James Belbin

While it's flattering that you think we're responsible for these rising prices, we'd argue that YouTubers are doing a lot more to raise awareness of these more obscure machines. Our advice is to keep the collecting fun and focus on what you can reasonably afford.

RETURN TO SELLER

Hey **Retro Gamer**,
I've owned many systems with hundreds of games to go with them, from my first computer in the early Eighties (Commodore 16) to the Xbox One. I always sold them so I could upgrade to the latest machine and now I've repurchased most of the systems I owned in my youth plus the games I had as a youngster, too. I've always wondered if I've ever unwittingly bought a game that I actually owned 30-odd years ago. I have fairly large collections of Commodore 16, Amstrad and PC Engine games which I'd once sold and bought again many years later. Have any of your readers bought a game from eBay and the like and it was actually one they sold years ago? Long-winded, I know, but something to think about.
Best regards to all.
Doug Orr

What a great thing to muse about, Doug. It's highly possible that we've all done it, of course, (particularly when buying locally) but without a way of actually marking the games I guess we'd never really know for sure. If anyone does have an example we'd love to hear about it.

JUST DO IT!

Hi guys,
In reply to Liam Carr's letter in issue 193 he should just subscribe like me, then he wouldn't have to worry about when each issue is on sale. Just a thought. Keep up the good work.
Dave Iucas

Thank you for the support, Dave. And yes, a subscription is the perfect way to get an issue of RG without worrying about when the magazine goes on sale.

REQUEST CITY

Hi **Retro Gamer**,
Could you put the *Reshoot R* soundtrack CD onto a cover CD? Could you package it in a clear plastic sleeve

» [C64] Ian would love it if someone turned *Uridium* on its side to create *Star Force*. Do you fancy it, Mr Braybrook?

CONTACT US

Snail Mail: Retro Gamer, Future Publishing, Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH2 6EZ

Email: retrogamer@futurenet.com

with artwork to fit into a slim CD Case? Could somebody (with Andrew Braybrook's permission) turn his game *Uridium* on to its side to make a vertically scrolling remake of *Star Force*? The Atari ST code could be used as a basis for the Amiga versions – AGA and OCS.

Ian Learmouth

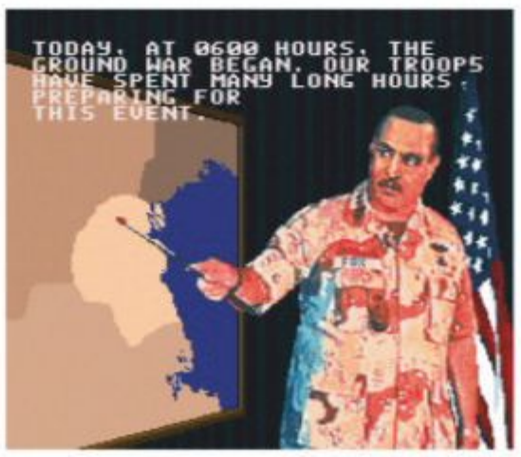
Those are certainly big requests, Ian! You never know. Maybe Andrew Braybrook himself will get the bug and want to code the game you've requested. He certainly enjoys talking about retro games still.

GARRY WHO?

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

Growing up I used to see a SNES game everywhere: *Super Battletank*. It was seemingly in every store. I often saw it being offered for sale at rock-bottom prices. And now it lines the bargain bins of every retro game store I come across. And yet, there's very little info out there on the net on this (seemingly massively overproduced) game. It would be fascinating to see you do an article on this: what was its backstory? Why were so many copies produced that it now peppers the top of retro game clearances everywhere? Why did such a lousy game (I've replayed it recently; it's terrible) have so much longevity? Also, the full name of the game is '*Garry Kitchen's Super Battletank*'. Not only is he no Sid Meier but, may I ask, who is Garry Kitchen, and was there ever a time when anyone would have cared that his name was on the box? Thanks.

Daniel



» [SNES] Inspired by the invasion of Kuwait, *Super Battletank* was voted Best Sim by *Game Informer* in 1992.

We're guessing you have not read issue 123 of the magazine as it features an in-depth feature on Garry that covers his entire career. You do make an interesting point about *Super Battletank,* however. It appears to be everywhere and there is very little solid information on it. We'll do what we can do to change that. Stay tuned!

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Letter Man

One very devoted and generous reader sent us two gigantic letters (and gifts) this month. Unfortunately, they are too large to fit into the Mailbag (they would've likely taken up six pages of the magazine). So we'd like to say a big thank you to Nic from Australia, we'll be writing back to you in the near future.

» [Amstrad CPC] We're confident that reader Doug Orr would have had *Get Dexter* in his Amstrad collection.

Your say

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on social media and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What's your favourite Konami game and why?

@8bitadc
Scramble! Played it every holiday for hours.

@NicMakin
Vendetta. The best of the Konami beat-'em-ups, and a key inspiration of *Raging Justice*. Though I always loved the look of *Gradius*, I always found it tough.

Kurt Machin
Rocket Knight Adventures. Classic platform fun! Great soundtrack, fantastic graphics and so enjoyable to play. I still own this for my Mega Drive.

@FlavioAR555
Castlevania SOTN! One of the best games ever! And, well, *Vandal Hearts*: a simple, but great TRPG!

@nakamuramartin
This is like choosing a favourite child, but I'd probably have to say *Super Castlevania IV* because it fuses amazing visuals, wonderful music and brilliant gameplay.

Steve Hird
Vulcan Venture. I just love side-scrolling shooters, but this one with its amazing soundtrack, graphics and weapon options is a favourite.

@ArcadeHunters
Haunted Castle… just kidding. Would have to be the home port of *Contra*. NES version as a kid, Famicom version as an adult.

@mepz3
Imagine thinking that it's not *Turtles In Time*.

» [Arcade] Konami's excellent *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* allowed for four-player mayhem.

Mike Tooley
Shaolin Road. Great pace and tempo to the game. It's a unique platform beat-'em-up hybrid with great level design and multiple ways to finish each stage.

@MarcoNewstalgie
Definitely *Metal Gear Solid*, especially the third one, *Snake Eater*! The gameplay is unique, the story is amazing and all the tears I shed for this game is wonderful.

@lymang
Gyruss, which I have loved since the first time I played it.

Bojan Kotur
Probably *Ping Pong* on the ZX Spectrum and *Gryzor* on the Amstrad.

retro GAMER

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"Holy Drokk!"

Jason Kingsley discusses the videogame history of 2000 AD

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ENDGAME

ZERO WING

» All your base are belong to us? Not on your life – this is the PC Engine conversion of Toaplan's arcade game, which features brand-new story scenes with full voice acting designed to take advantage of the CD-ROM format. You don't even get to see CATS, the villain who made that iconic threat. But what do you get by way of replacement? Let's skip to the end and find out...

01

» "Well, you've killed my wife," says the villain of the piece. "I wish you hadn't done that, I was planning to do it after our successful conquest of the universe, to prove the depth of my villainy." The hero remains unmoved by his turmoil.

02

» "You didn't think conquering the universe was enough?" replies the hero. "Not to mention the fact that you kidnapped my girlfriend." Our villain briefly ponders revenge, but falters. "Whatever mate, take her."

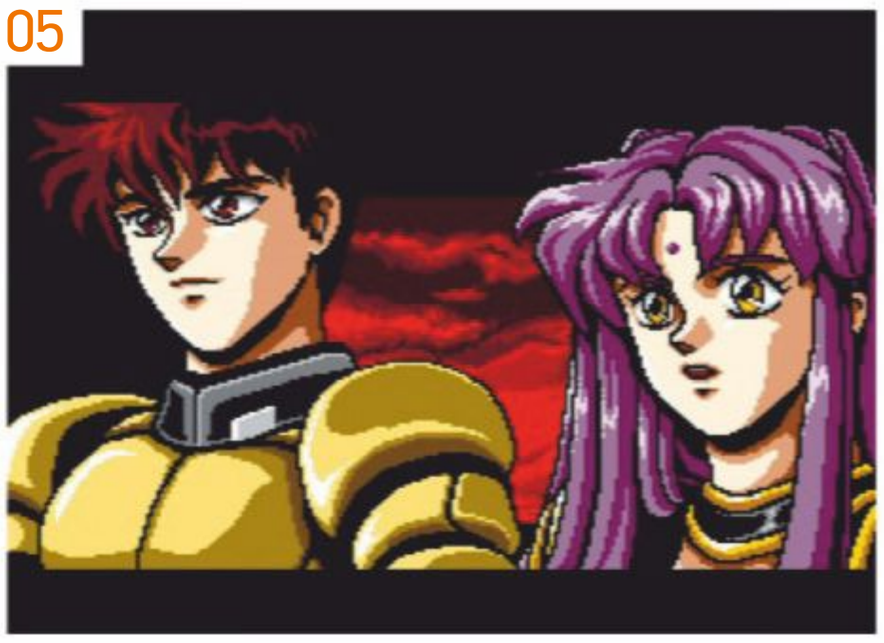
03

» "Oh, cheers. Anyway, you've done a naughty so now you've got to go to space jail," the hero cheerily says. "Balls to that," the villain responds. "Do you know what happens to beautiful men like me there? Haircuts. I've got another idea."

04

» The villain pulls out a little device that has 'Boom-Maker' written on the side, and clicks the button on it. Immediately, a bright and powerful explosion rips his body to pieces, killing him instantly. "Holy crap," the hero shouts. "Did that guy just blow himself up to avoid the barber?"

05



» "Well, that's over. Let's go home and rewatch *Peep Show*," our rather nonchalant hero offers. "Are you joking?" his girlfriend responds, "I've just been held hostage for ages, before being showered in my captor's blood and charred guts. The only thing I want to see right now is a therapist."

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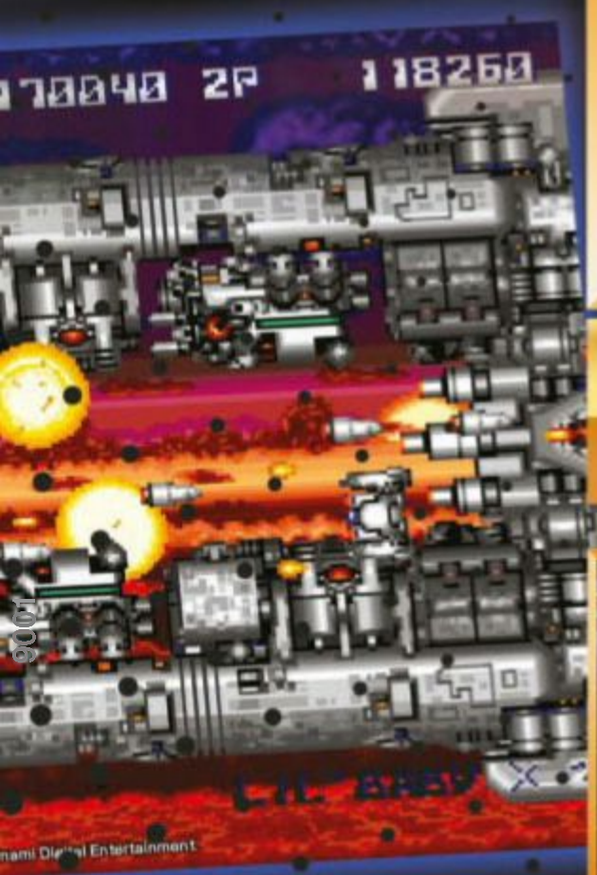

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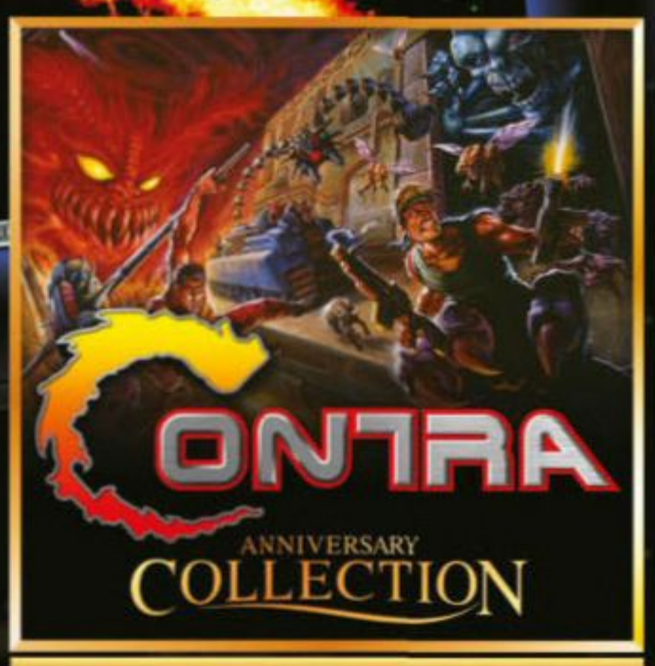

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